

summer/1995 • free, as God intended all of us to be



anhedonia

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anhedonia . . . hating Dole, loving you

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Thanks:

My parents,
Rebecca, Vicky,
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Nasties, Amy,
Dave, Dana,
Laura, Ned,
Wendy, Nancy,
advertisers, and
as always, to
Dennis for
inspiration.

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Because there is more to life than 'what if we ...' relationships and Monster Magnet press releases. Because some mornings it takes one hell of an internal pep talk to get out of bed.

Beautiful Artwork ... everywhere/removable centerfold insert

Letter from the Megalomaniac

For starters I just want to apologize to all of my advertisers and readers for getting this done on time — from now on I'll try harder to be months or years behind like a real fanzine.

This has been a weird summer. For some reason I have this static feeling that comes from an uneasy truce between the forces of the cosmos and the perversions of our culture. No Waco-type debacles, no midwestern cannibal cults, no obvious heroes or villains springing up in our midst. Hell, even the OJ trial is getting a little old. The weather has been beautiful, but almost trite: no rain, just sun, sort of like Albert Brooks' vision of limbo in "Defending Your Life."

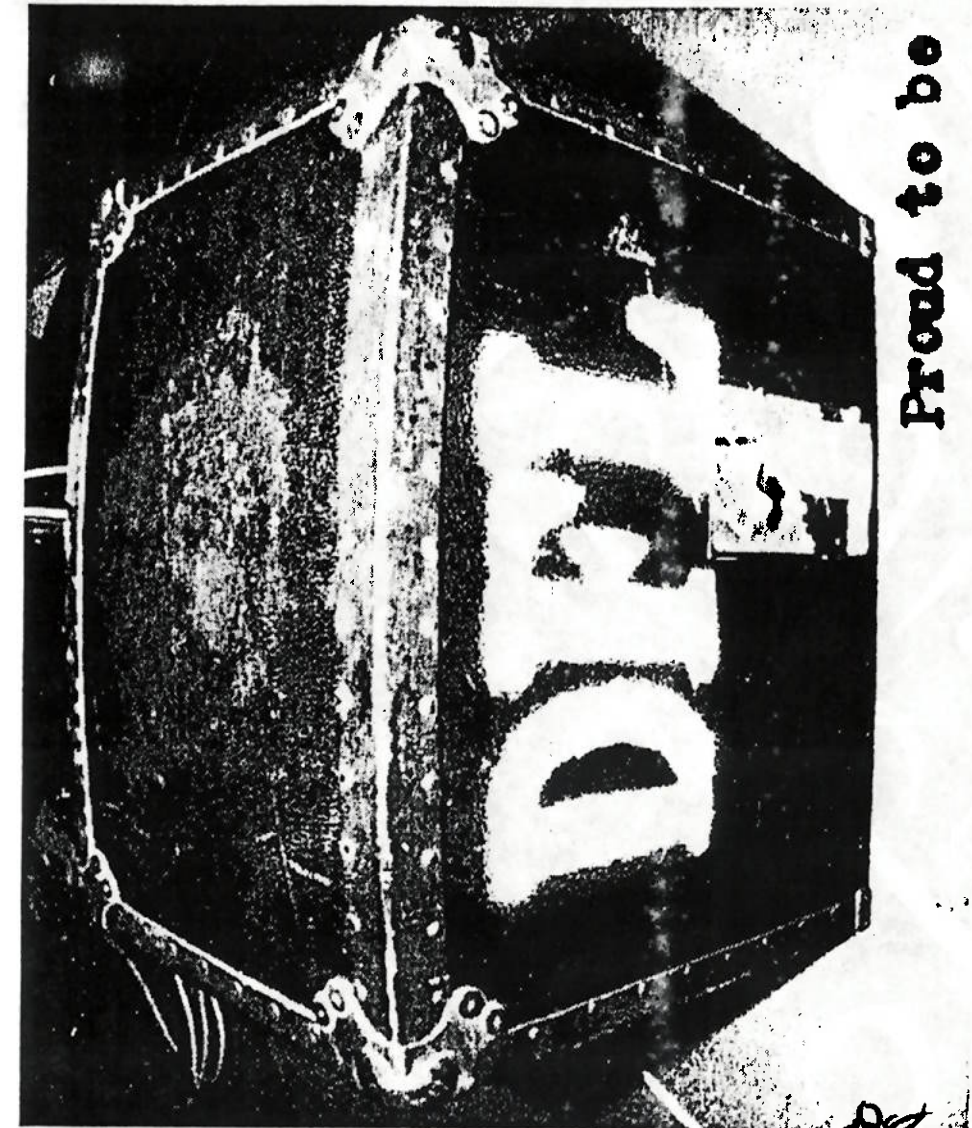
Nothing big happened with me. I started a record label, and it's doing okay. I got a real job (gulp!). I didn't have any significant emotional or sexual experiences. Just... waiting. For what? I don't know. There must be more than this (with apologies to Bryan Ferry).

Many of you may have noticed that you have not seen or received a Spring/95 issue of *anhedonia*. There's a reason. Firstly, it does exist, and has been assembled and is awaiting mailing and distribution. The problem is that people assume that the cheerless things that I touch on are a complete and accurate representation of myself, and since I like to indulge myself in the thought that there's more to me than raw, painful ramblings, I thought I should put out a happier issue before another bleak one. And brother, is that Spring issue bleak. It'll probably come out sometime this Fall, so if you're on the mailing list, it'll arrive. It's teensy, green and has nothing to do with music (thank God). *anhedonia* is also now available on the internet (text only) — call up Rebecca Fagan's "Page O' Fun" @ <http://www.tiac.net/users/rfagan/> and you can read away to your heart's content.

Speaking of mailing lists, I purchased a bulk mail permit from those gods of efficiency, the U.S. Postal Service. And some folks say that they haven't been receiving them, even though I've been sending them. If that's you, let me know.

As for content, what can I say about this issue other than "I'm sorry?" Again, I went overboard on the reviews. What can I say? I got excited. There has been an astounding surfeit of good records coming out lately, and I couldn't feel more spoiled. There's also an interview with two members of Pell Mell, who have recently released an amazing album and are planning another. Everyone talks about interview subjects being nice, but I want to distinguish them further: Bob and Dave have been not only nice, but supportive of me in ways that I never expected. I'm grateful to them both. In the center of this issue is a twelve-page insert of artwork printed on nice parchment bond paper: these pages represent my effort to include something of lasting value with this rag. My heartfelt thanks goes out to the artists, who not only were generous enough to contribute, but put up with me and my slowness and poor organization. This is an area in which there can and should be improvement, and I'm already working on it.

If you're reading *anhedonia* for the first time, welcome. It is a quarterly journal of music, writing, art, liberal invective and my particular brand of cliché and self-involved writing. It is free, as God intended all of us to be. If you want to subscribe, just send your name and mailing address (money for postage is optional but sincerely appreciated). If you're going to be moving a lot, be good about address changes or leave a more permanent one. Third class mail is not forwarded. *anhedonia* is not intended for Republicans or conservatives; they can use their free-market purchasing power to finance their own entertainment. In the meantime, may I suggest mugging one of the Republican members of the freshman class of the House of Conservatives (to call it the House of Representatives would be just making too much of a mockery of the concept of truth, something for which I still have some regard) and taking yourself out to dinner and the movies? Thanks to you, it works for all of us. Remember, when fascism comes to the USA, it will have an American face.



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PELL MELL (cont.)

anhedonia: What year was that?
Bob: 1980.
anhedonia: 1980?!? You've been around for fifteen years...

Bob: Yeah...
anhedonia: That's amazing. What's the current lineup? You, Dave, Greg Freeman and Steve Fisk? Who plays what?

Bob: I play drums and guitar, Dave plays guitars, Steve plays an array of keyboards, and Greg plays bass and guitar as well. So really it's like we're a drummer and a guitar player and a bass player and a keyboard player but we play lots of other stuff too.

anhedonia: So when you were at the U. of Oregon, you and Bill were forming a band, did you have other members too who are no longer in the band? Is that correct?

Bob: Yes, that's right.
anhedonia: Were you always named Pell Mell?

Bob: Yeah, we were, because we had a show booked before we had a name, and we needed to quick come up with a name for a poster that was going to go out. So Arnie May, the other guitar player at the time, opened up a dictionary and found "Pell Mell" on that page... it's a stupid story.

anhedonia: No, it's not... that's rock n' roll right there. Lots of bands have done that. R.E.M. did that.

Bob: Let me just correct the earlier version of what I just said. We didn't form at the University of Oregon. The University of Oregon is in Eugene. We didn't form the band until 1980 in Portland, Oregon. We both left U. of O. and ended up in Portland.

Dave: Interestingly enough, I was going to school in Corvallis, Oregon at the same time as these guys, but had no idea that they even existed.

Bob: And we had no idea that you existed. Isn't that kind of cosmic?

anhedonia: So you and Bill and the other people in the band at the time, you rehearsed, you played gigs?

Bob: Yeah, weddings, bar mitzvahs...

We played a lot in Portland and Seattle and Eugene and Olympia from 1980 to 1983. At that time we had two cuts on Bruce Pavitt's infantile Sub Pop label. He put out a fanzine and cassette compilations. We were on Sub Pop five and Sub Pop seven. We also had cuts on a sampler put out by Greg Sage of the Wipers called the Trap Sampler. We also put out our first EP called *Rhyming Guitars*. We were playing in Olympia when we met Steve Fisk.

anhedonia: I had always thought that you had met these other people in college, or on the west coast, and had never actually been a performing/working band, and that you had just started sending tapes around and had grown from that. So I can see that you were Pell Mell, Portland scene band. And then did the band break up at some point?

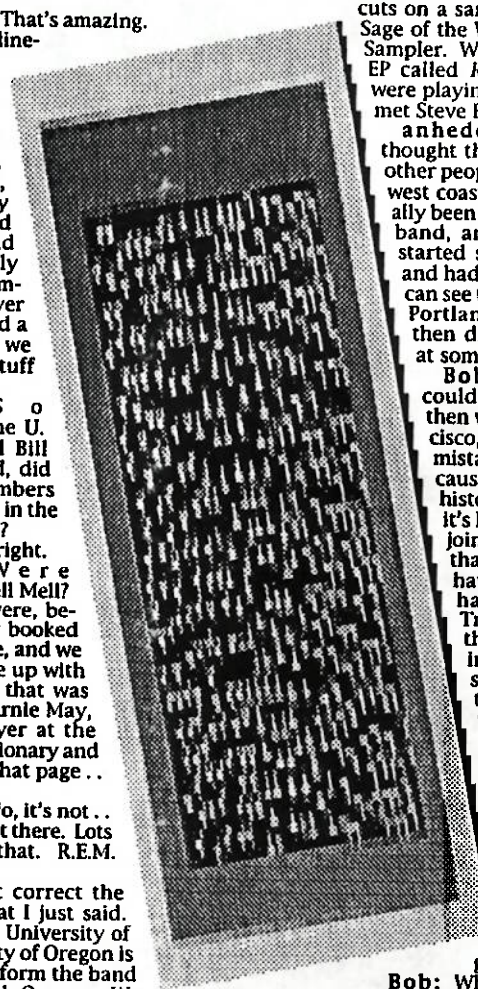
Bob: We got as big as we could get in Portland and then we moved to San Francisco, which was a really big mistake professionally, because San Francisco has a history of being "kind" to it's local bands. Steve Fisk joined on keyboards and that's when Greg joined, having answered our ad hanging in the Rough Trade record store. And that's when Dave came into the picture as our sound man, and it was there that Ray Farrell was our manager. Ray, who used to work at Rough Trade distribution, and then worked at SST. We toured up and down the coast.

Dave: These guys were touring, and they needed a sound man, so I joined. It was great.

Bob: When we were out there, playing in San Francisco, we did tours with Love Tractor and recorded a whole bunch of demos most of which ended up on the *Bumpercrop* record which came out on SST. That record came out after the band sort of officially broke up.

anhedonia: And what happened when the band broke up? What made you do it?

Bob: I decided that I was gonna leave because I was getting too frustrated with the



amount of effort required to be in a band compared with the rewards that were coming back. We could tour and open for Rank and File until we were blue in the face [ed. note: Rank and File's *Sundown* LP was one of the best records out of LA in the early 80's. Find it, learn it, love it], but we just weren't going to get anywhere in San Francisco. I had this growing interest in graphic design that I was finding much more rewarding, so I decided to leave the band and go to school in Philadelphia for graphic design, and these guys decided to quit too.

Dave: When the band broke up, I started to play guitar. My wife wanted to go to Yale for graduate school, so I worked in the language lab which had this little recording studio in the basement. Bob would come up and visit, and I had his drum kit stored at the school. We'd set the kit up and record all these demos, and that's where *Flow* was really written.

anhedonia: Are you two the principal songwriters for the band?

Bob: Usually Dave or Greg would shoe forth little nuggets, and the rest of us would all add to it.

anhedonia: So you had a bunch of song ideas, Bob would come up, you would show them to Bob, send a copy to Greg and to Steve, Steve would put on a keyboard track...

Bob: This was when Steve was working with Screaming Trees. Steve was stuck in the middle of nowhere with this incredible 24-track facility. So there were little spurts of activity in pairs. Greg and Bill and Steve would get together in San Francisco, Dave and I would get together in New Haven.

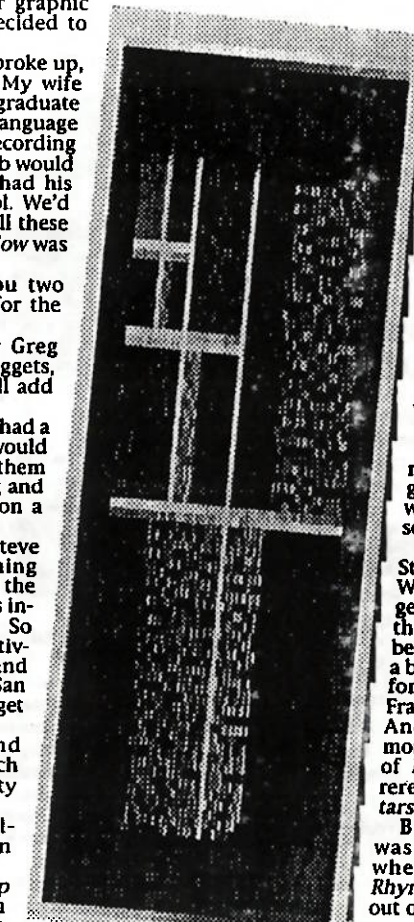
Dave: We would send tapes back and forth to each other, and were getting pretty excited about it.

anhedonia: You already had an album out on SST...

Bob: The *Bumpercrop* album, which was sort of a clean house compilation sort of record. It was certainly not meant to be a real album, it was mostly demos and live stuff.

anhedonia: Why was it released, then?

Bob: It was released because SST thought that it was really cool music and that someone should hear it.



anhedonia: Who at SST?

Bob: Greg Ginn.

anhedonia: What was it like working with him? I hear that he's insane these days.

Bob: [laughing] Yeah, I think he is insane. Steve dealt with him, but it was always insane trying to get anything out of them on the phone.

anhedonia: They seem to be sort of fading as a label... Was it hard to work for SST?

Bob: Well, the *Bumpercrop* record was sort of like our epitaph, in a way. And then they put that record out, and they liked it, and we had been making these tapes and stuff. Greg and Bill came out to visit in New Haven and we played some of the stuff on the tapes, and everyone had all the foundations at that point.

anhedonia: What was right after *Bumpercrop*, that you recorded in New Haven?

Bob: *Flow*.
anhedonia: So, really the only time you guys played together was for the recording sessions of that?

Dave: Yeah, and Steve wasn't even there. When we played together, we decided that this stuff was so much better when we played as a band that we asked SST for money to go to San Francisco to Greg's studio. And they had some money left from the sale of *Bumpercrop* and the rerelease of *Rhyming Guitars*.

Bob: Also in there was a trip to Portland where we remixed the *Rhyming Guitar* EP to come out on SST.

anhedonia: Were you seeing any money?

Bob: No, it was something we were paying money to do.

anhedonia: So basically it sounds to me like a real plantation mentality, if SST realizes any profit from the sales of these

CD/Album/EP Reviews

Cheaper than warm milk, easier on the tummy than Leno ...

Silly rating system is as follows: I rate these CDs, records and tapes by what I consider their fair purchase price. And while I didn't pay for most of these, I know what it's like to forgo lunch for a new EP, only to get it home and hate it. You just feel hungrier.

Current Boston rates for these lovely consumer goods is as follows:

- \$13.98, \$14.98 for new, non-discounted CDs.
- \$10.88 for new recent releases on sale (hello, Newbury Comics).
- \$9.99 for used copies of recent releases.
- 99¢ to \$9.99 for used copies of all other CDs.
- CD EPs usually about a dollar a song when used, \$5.99 to \$8.99 new.

I know it's arbitrary, and reduces things to a rather mercenary level. What can I say? I'm a sweetheart. "FLP" is the highest rating, indicating that I think the release in question is worth full list price.

A brief word about this art/money thing: when you think about it, CDs (outrageously overpriced as they are, in terms of mark-up) are a good deal relative to movies, expensive restaurants, phone sex, Ewok pajamas, etc. And as far as records go, they're an even better deal, but I always wear out my favorites. I like CD convenience. Bored yet? Just wait ...

All • *Pummel* (Interscope)

Grade B+ SoCal bubblepunk that passes cheerfully across the transom. Absent any true killing hooks (like All's glorious 1993 single "Shreen," or any of Green Day's hits), this album relies entirely upon songwriting style and production values for its limited appeal. Sad, since All (*nee* the Descendants) had a significant role in creating this subgenre, and they're accomplished players. They just don't come up with

enough strong songs. Vague homophobic/newsport jock culture feel is a further detraction. (\$2.99)

American Standard • *Piss and Vinegar* (another planet)

Beefy, swinging urban rock with occasional flashes of originality and well above average playing. Unfortunately, American Standard huddle too easily beneath the security blanket of distorted power chords and obvious choruses. Too bad, because when they get into a more Dischordant riff, like the verse sections of opener "Think Punk" or "Twenty Reasons," they do a neat job of creating tension. Then they go 90's cock-rock and blow it. Ugh. (\$2.99)

Apehangers • *Ultrasounds* (A&M)

Piss-poor bad-boy posturing scheming for the collective allowance of the Beavis & Butthead crowd. ... how admirable. The chorus of the lead track repeats "This is my life and I know what to do with it!" I beg to differ. Not only should A&M drop this band, they should torture and then fire the person who signed them. (Yuk)

The Apples In Stereo • *Fun Trick Noisemaker* (SpinART)

Classic middle American power-pop, the Apples in Stereo steal the convertible for one last sunny joyride; pretty harmonies and beefy single-note riffs bedazzle and finally complete the past 18 months' implicit coronation of Rick Nielsen (songwriter/guitarist behind Cheap Trick, not that this is that good). Melodies are sung smoothly in voices of both genders. Not all suburban angst is ugly. A strong record. (\$9.99)

Bailter Space • *Wammo* (Matador)

Bailter Space have been living in New York for several years now, but still embody the forbidding and glamorous gloom that characterizes much of the guitar-saturated rock from their native New Zealand. Perennial heroes of the college rock scene, they continue to turn out albums of dense and rewarding rock music with phenomenal regularity; this is their third album in three years, and they've been torturing Fender amps since J. Mascis was still in high school.

Wammo finds them delving deeper into prettiness than on last year's *Vortura*. Maybe someone at Matador slipped them Guided by Voices, because a few of these tracks faintly echo Robert Pollard's sprightly, clarion phrasing. Not that Bailter Space weren't always capable of stately, deep blue melodies, but previously they've been more sparing with them, and their albums often fell back into an oppressive, if ultimately cathartic, avalanche of blunt guitar riffing; definitely an acquired taste. The melodicism of *Wammo* isn't a stylistic change as much as an alteration of the mix of song types on their albums. Where *Vortura* offered two or three songs that could honestly call themselves pretty, *Wammo* has a fistful, including a lead track ("Untied") that will probably see a lot of college airplay. Elegant, serpentine bass lines pitch and yaw beneath some of the sharpest rock guitar sounds you'll hear these days, alternatively acerbic and plangent. While Alistair Parker and John Halvorsen (who trade bass and six-string duties) may not have virtuoso skills, they both play guitar from their viscera—with originality and a ferocious passion that makes attending their live shows compulsory.

Their approach to playing is marvelously organic. Two minutes or seven—they'll play them 'til they're done right, and not a moment more or less. *Wammo* is a moody and attractive album. (\$13.98/FLP)

Jule Brown • *The Legendary Magic of Jule Brown* (No. 6)

Addictive, brooding homemade country gospel, poignant and crushingly downbeat. Brown's press kit makes him out to be some kind of four-tracking gentleman farmer, and I'd almost buy it if this record weren't so contemporary, so obviously connected to the work of Fred Comog (East River Pipe), Stephin Merrit (Magnetic Fields/6ths) and other self-recording songwriters who choose to go beyond the static and hum of the Church of Barlow. This guy sounds like he only makes it into town a couple of times a month to pick up his parcel from Ajax, gussied up in a scratchy brown suit. He makes the folks at the general store nervous, but only cuz they're dumb and can't see the light of God that surely glows from his mouth when he mumbles. One of my favorites of the year so far. (\$12.98/FLP)

Franklin Bruno • *A Bedroom Community* (Simple Machines)

Certain aspects of my life would be much easier if I wrote a really nice review of this, but I'm afraid that as much as I like *Nothing Painted Blue* and the Extra Glens and all the stuff Franklin writes about in various publications, this record puts me to sleep (no pun intended). In a recent interview he more or less defended his atypically verbose lyric writing as his natural voice, and I'm perfectly comfortable with that—I'd never ask anyone to dumb down in the name of creativity (unless, um, they're signed to Crypt). But without NPB's power behind him, Bruno's melodies just flutter about without purpose like a moth hovering around a flame. Like Harry Nilsson, I wish he'd jump into the fire. In this case, that'd mean a central, obvious chorus hook or more variance in his vocal delivery. This just doesn't stack up to his other work, musical or otherwise. (\$3.99)

Bush • *Sixteen Stone* (Interscope)

Future AOR purveyors of America take note: here is your blueprint. Big, stupid songs with above average chops. An absolutely worthless album. (Really. I meant it when I said worthless).

Buzzkill • *I Feel Like Myself Again* (Antidote)

Mediocre punk-metal with a noticeable amount of energy. Like watching a fifteen-year-old throw a tantrum, there's a lot of outrage but little character. Neat guitar sound

on the last song, though. Buzzkill are, in the words of Simon LeBon, "Wild Boys." (\$1.99)

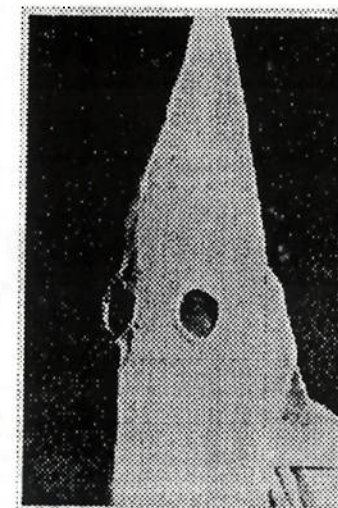
the Cakekitchen • *Stompin' Through the Boneyard* (Merge)

Slow motion singalongs of submarine sublimation. Silvery strokes of flange-soaked guitar are mixed into the background of Graeme Jefferies' blue-collar Bowie stylings, some insistent drumming and some damn catchy hooks. So much better than most commercial or collegiate fare. Stately, timeless, and elegant. (\$13.98/FLP)

Catchers • *Mute* (Warner Brothers)

The monochrome, semi-surreal pseudo-naturalist album art is your first warning; the reverbed acoustic strums and great swaths of keyboard complete the

WE'VE ONLY JUST BEGUN (turn the page)



"I was thinking we would do a two album deal with an option for a third..."

CD/ALBUM REVIEWS (cont.)

picture: sensitive UK pop-poet types enclosed. But give them their due, because Catchers have an extremely sure hand for glib but sticky hooks. If you listen more closely you'll hear lots of pleasing chord changes played with welcome understatement. I've no idea if they can replicate their frail studio sound live, but I could care less—this type of deeply burnished pop has been too rare an animal since the demise of Prefab Sprout, and Catchers deliver good choruses. The former single "Shifting" (see *anhedonia* Summer/94 for review) is typical of Catchers' charming style, building to a wussy, cathartic release. The album flows well, and would be a fine addition to a twee popper's collection. (\$7.99)

China Drum • *Barrier EP* (510)

Pleasingly tuneful loud, commercial-alternative music. Will be tagged by newhippies (a/k/a indie scenesters) for the loud guitars and testosterone, but fuck 'em, those little twerps don't know how to let it go. Naw, what I dislike about China Drum is that they don't sound like the Cult. The lyrics are overblown like Ian Astbury's, but gosh, they're dumb (not that Astbury was near an honorary degree). The guitar hooks, conversely, try too hard to be clever—anyone making hard rock should check out the Cult's third album just to see how irrelevant complexity is to the form. If China Drum take themselves less seriously, though, they could be palatable FM stars (tee hee). (\$1.99/6 songs)

Cobalt • *Radio Snake Charmer* (Queenle)

The most surprising thing about Cobalt's long-awaited debut (two previous versions were scrapped) is its fascinating cohesion—try as one may to find a soft spot or questionable call, the album just keeps rattling one excellent song after another past your ears. Silvery waves of bass lap gently at the front edge of

"Dragonfly," the album's lead track, setting the framework for a ten-song workout of Yasmin Kuh's steamy, vivid vocals. Her sheer presence in some of these songs is comparable to PJ Harvey (a comparison she dislikes but will hear again—it's meant as a compliment). Her talent is that strong. One of the better rock records this year. (\$12.98/FLP)

Cornershop • *Hold On It Hurts* (Merge)

Cornershop excel in pairing shrewd, puckish phrases to spastic, repetitive riffs dashed off on a garagey guitar or sitar; a noticeably less insular take on post-Velvets indie rock, whether it lurch and sputter like the terrific, frantic shuffle of "Reader's Wives" or drone perpetually ("Inside Rani"). The latter track burns beautifully, even though it uses the same tired ranting preacher sample that the Jesus and Mary Chain tacked on to their cover of "Surfin' USA."

The high point of the album is the interposition of the sneering proto-punk of "Born Disco; Died Heavy Metal" with the outright rage of "Counteraction." Some tracks lack the melodic hooks to call this a great CD, but it sure is an arresting debut. (\$13.99/FLP)

Club 69 • *Adults Only* (Tribal America/I.R.S.)

Shopping-mall health-club music, soulless as the white, red and purple maggot-ridden zombies in George Romero films. But nowhere near as appealing. And before I'm once again accused of indie-rock snobbery, just ask someone who saw me at Moby at Lollapalooza whether or not I like dance music. (1¢)

the Crabs • *Jackpot* (K)

Well here's a new idea, rhythm guitar and some pop melodies. Don't know if it's the genre's pending tiredness or if the Crabs are just getting their sea legs, but this is a standard indie album, made all the more normal for it's good moments being juxtaposed with several boring ones. When they're on, Crabs are in the upper echelon; when they're



"I told you: rayon chintz... Dammit! What am I gonna do with all this silk?"

not, I start thinking about seriously getting into jazz. (\$6.99)

Curdflur • *Ripe Siren* (Ginko)

An amalgam of recently popular styles of metal, minus good lyrics and distinguishing features. Dissonant guitar, funky bass, Perry Farrell clone on the mike and I'm gone... ouch, this is boring. (99¢)

D.F.L. • *Proud To Be* (Epitaph)

Traditional hardcore with high-level chops, a great recording and lotsa snotty. My Mom put it best (see her review section) when she said "it's as if they think if they do it louder, harder, faster, than that means it's better." Works for me. The downside is a soggy second half of the CD with more thud than ping. Still, the first half is spry and cussy, not at all fussy. (\$7.99)

Dirty Three • *the Dirty Three* (Touch and Go)

Several bands have been hinting at this for a number of years: Celtic-stained fiddle/punk miasma, a honey pure and sweet, dulcet spray of notes. Such close intimate sounds, private and tender, but weighty and engrossing. This is a punk band (rhythm section, basically) with gorgeously played violin all over the top of it. It's absolutely beautiful. (\$12.99/FLP)

Dripping Goss • *Blowtorch Consequence* (another planet)

Brutish, cunning songs with extraordinarily thoughtful arrangements, reminiscent of Frank Zappa. Fire-obsessed, diving into wickedness and storming your ears like a Mongolian raiding party, Dripping Goss make an horrific racket, but it's smart heavy rock, and when was the last time you heard those words all in a row? (\$8.99)

Dry Wall • *Work the Dumb Oracle* (I.R.S.)

Stan Ridgway used to front the underappreciated Wall of Voodoo, an early 80's L.A. nuevo-wavo outfit with a desert shtick and a riveting live show. Since then he's sent up a few flares: limp solo records and slightly better soundtrack scores. But anyone who writes a song like Wall of Voodoo's "Mexican Radio" has a lifetime pass to my musical heart, so, recent crappy solo albums or no, I dropped *Oracle* into the player. Overinflated, kitschy ditties with straight-from-CNN lyrics that inadvertently imitate the emptiness they seek to criticize. No good choruses, either. This one couldn't even get played on Mexican radio. (99¢)

East River Pipe • *Poor Fricky* (Merge)

Is it an indication of Fred Cornog's extraterrestrial songwriting abilities to say that this isn't as good

as *Shining Hours In A Can* and that it's still a great record? Because of all the glittering, fatally gorgeous choruses that Cornog spills out, people tend to ignore the sophisticated gentility of his guitar playing and the impossibly accomplished recordings he achieves in his bedroom.

And sophistication is what Cornog trades on. I suspect that he's far less interested in gratuitous sex than, say, Greg Dulli of the Afghan Whigs, who wishes he were sophisticated but only occasionally manages a trumped up suaveness. No, Cornog is the real deal: cool, incisive, creative and stunningly original in the way he reinterprets classic gentle pop.

The album's one weakness is the droop of some songs. Not previously noted as the kind of guy who's CD would get played in aerobics classes, this time around he sounds completely drained. No less competent, but morose and spiritually broken. It's sad, and haunting, and I have fallen in love with East River Pipe. I don't know anyone with a heart who hasn't. (\$14.98/FLP)

Enormous • *Greetings* (e pluribus unum)

Wannabe arena rock with a distinct, acrid odor and accompanying bloat. At least they go the (bad, later) Pretenders/Cult route instead of Counting Crows/STP. "Chicken Lily" might even dent a playlist in their hometown. The rest is turgid poop. (99¢)

Fledgling • *Fledgling* (TVT)

So much is wrong with this that it's hard to pick a starting point. OK, cover art: a gratuitous party-shot illustration of a little girl crying. Yuck. Guitars:

big and dumb, dumber, dumbest. But the singer's vocals (sorry, no name, I'm not digging up the press kit) are the ultimate insult to listeners' intelligence. Overly demonstrative and yet utterly pedestrian, they sound like some state school graduate's opening spiel at a twelve-step meeting: important and interesting to her, I'm sure, but... By the way, the songs also suck, an unintentionally hilarious mass of disturbingly obvious melodies and hapless chords. This shit would

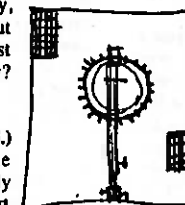
embarrass Pat Benatar. (Dispose of this in an environmentally safe manner)

Flying Saucer Attack • *Further* (Drag City)

FSA direct their momentum and jump up to a major indie label with their third full-length CD. Like its predecessors, *Further* is a genial, mesmerizing album. Flying Saucer Attack's fascination is the contradiction between the songs' slow, delicate melodies and the expansive and thick cloak of abrasive distortion in which they are wrapped. Resisting the temptation to rock out or obscure their vulnerabilities with irony, they



all thumbnail sketches: Tom Devlin



CD/ALBUM REVIEWS (cont.)

negotiate an improbable teetering tightrope act of blissful hiss and romantic saturation. Trippy, good-looking and esoteric. (\$8.99)

The For Carnation V *Flight Songs* EP (Matador)

Exquisite, pricy aural wallpaper, this is indie rock by Laura Ashley from the Chicago show-off school brand of slow-fi, lite-rock "I think we're almost jazz" (y'know, Tortoise and stuff). Plays a hard game of trick shots and slack intellect, with gaping holes of deep grief. Impossibly preppy and depressed, I think I was a little off with the Laura Ashley reference. It's more like the Tweeds catalog. Not a putdown. (\$5.99/3 dirges)

The Friends of Dean Martinez V *The Shadow of Your Smile* (Sub Pop)

Members of Giant Sand dawdle in Arizona long enough to do a hard mesa take on the lite-rock thing (see: previous review). While their is a bit of a non-rock conceit, the record avoids hokiness like a weeping lesion, going instead for a strong but polite bent peyote groove, pretty as hell and quicksilver elusive. Improbably, the Friends of Dean Martinez (and guess whose lawyers didn't like their original name?) make a virtue of faintness. It's hard to get away with suggestion, especially with a listening audience that demands explicitness, but they do... (\$8.99)

the Galaxy Trio V *In The Harem* (Estrus)

At eight tracks under twenty minutes, this is frustratingly slim, but we shall see...

Oddly, this is a more muted outing than last year's explosive *Saucers Over Vegas*. I mean that in the most literal sense: Jim Crabbe's guitars were miked weirdly, and sound muffled. That's a big deal, because as Estrus honcho Dave Crider'd tell you himself, this is fetish gear, done up for enthusiasts of six-string gunslinger derring-do. And while all the parts are in the right places, nothing's as compelling as "Log Jam" or "Jack Lord's Hair" from the previous CD. That said, the Galaxy Trio have mastered an emotional transliteration that fits tight as leather pants — graceful execution of difficult moves. (\$6.99/should-be FLP/8 songs)

the Geraldine Fibbers V *Lost Somewhere Between the Earth and My Home* (Virgin)

Country-rock with an edge, a captivating live show and occasional hints of backwoods fear. Nice CD (see my Mom's review). (\$7.99)

Gin Gan V *Just Glu It* (Posh Boy)

Laughably predictable furious boy lyrics coupled to generic hard guitars, notable for their curious refer-

ence to several different styles (surf, speedmetal, garage punk) and sucking at all of them. Good bassist, though — he should find a real band. (79c)

godheadSilo V *Elephantus of the Night* (Kill Rock Stars)

Along with mid-period George Michael, ghS are one of my favorite pop acts. This nine-track EP hitches four new songs to five old ones (The "Friendship Village" EP and a track from the *Stars Kill Rock* compilation). ghS were ripped from the festering scumplit of North Dakota: Fargo, where drunken finger-fucks behind the dilapidated bus station pass for declarations of love. Hearts full of nihilistic curiosity, godheadSilo also occasionally noodle around with careful songwriting, blowtorch in one hand while waving a cheery hello to our collective id with the other. They're not out to hurt anyone, but they're not going to stop what they're doing, either. If this sounds punishing, throw in fascinating and unforgiving (and maybe even 'majestic' for the vigorous "Nutritious Treat," a brutal little chestnut), and you have it right. Brilliant, savage noise. (\$9.99/FLP)

The Grifters V *Eureka* EP (Shangri-La)

Proto-garage-rock with great depth and an added dimension of culturally savvy guitar sounds and shifts, the Grifters have come quite a ways since the scattered and frenetic "Corolla Hoist." Four of the seven songs here are outright ballads. The scary backwoods dirge of "Slow Day for the Cleaning Woman" is relentlessly down, with a close, fetid and dismal air masking an invasive central hook. It's the same psychological territory staked out by Red, Red Meat on their best songs, and features the church organ sound that kicked that band's last 7" so well. The Grifters write great songs and will survive the passing of the Amer-indie trend. Last great unsigned American band? (\$8.99/FLP)

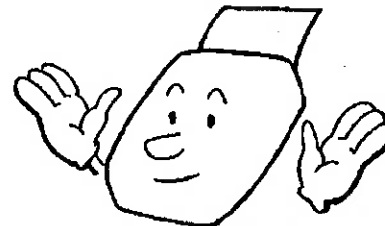
Guv'ner V *Hard For Measy For You* (Ecstatic Peace)

Atonal, dissonant downtown punk as religious ritual: there's far, far too much Sonic Youth worship here, especially given that it's released on Thurston Moore's label. The female vocals are better than the male ones. A few of the songs are okay, but by and large Guv'ner's sound is better than their writing. They're underachieving. (\$4.99)

Gwen Mars V *Magnoshem* (Hollywood)

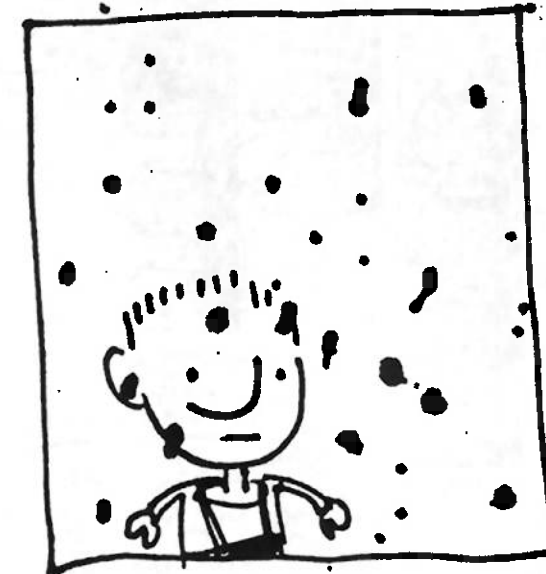
Imagine Michael Eisner making out with Billy Corgan. No? The Smashing Pumpkins performing a soundtrack smash for "Waterproof Training Bra — The

OH, GOODY! (cont. on page 17)



"Did you hear the rumor about Billy Corgan?"

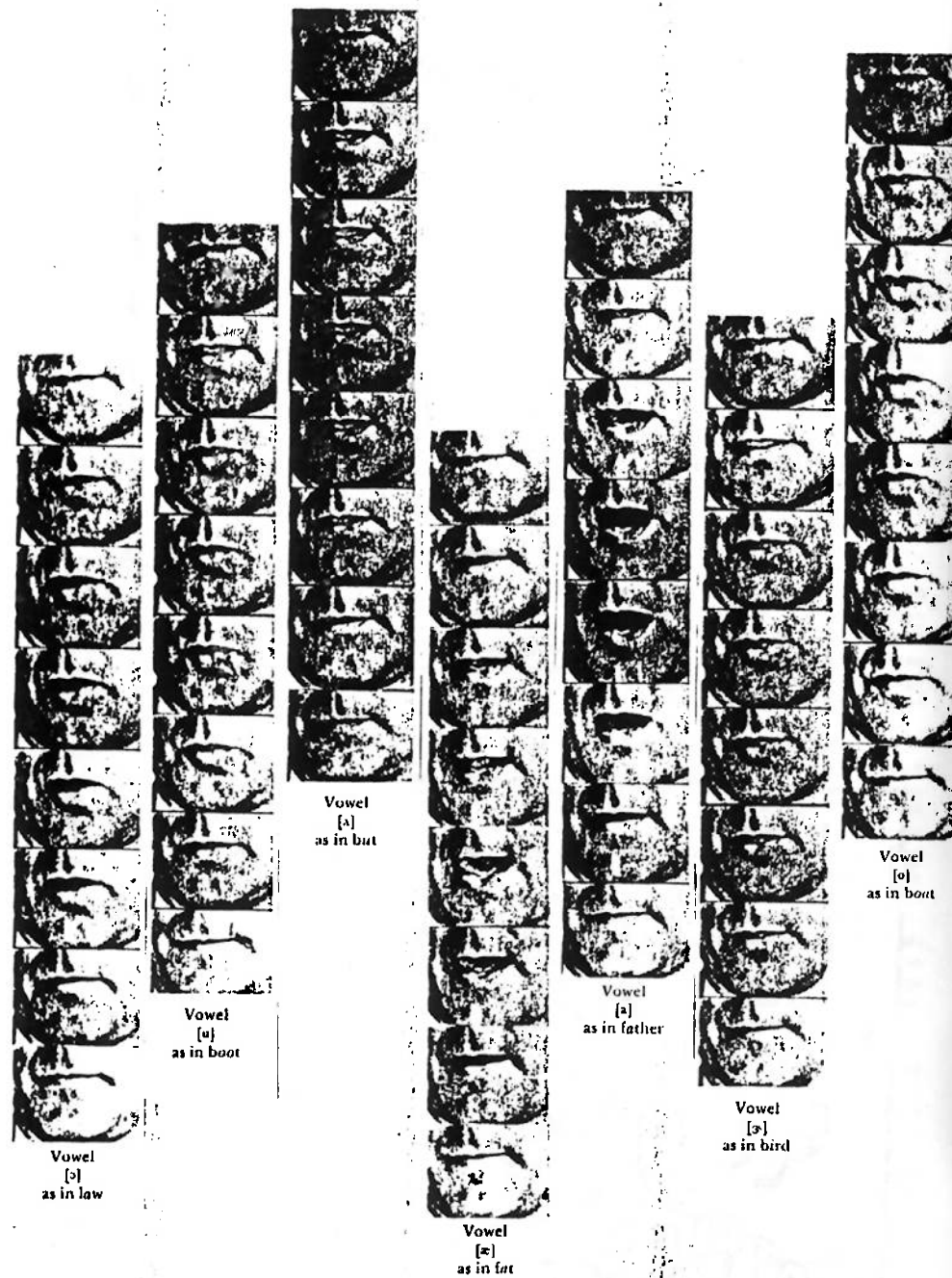
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SKETCHES: Tom Devlin



obviously, page counting is not a personal strength.

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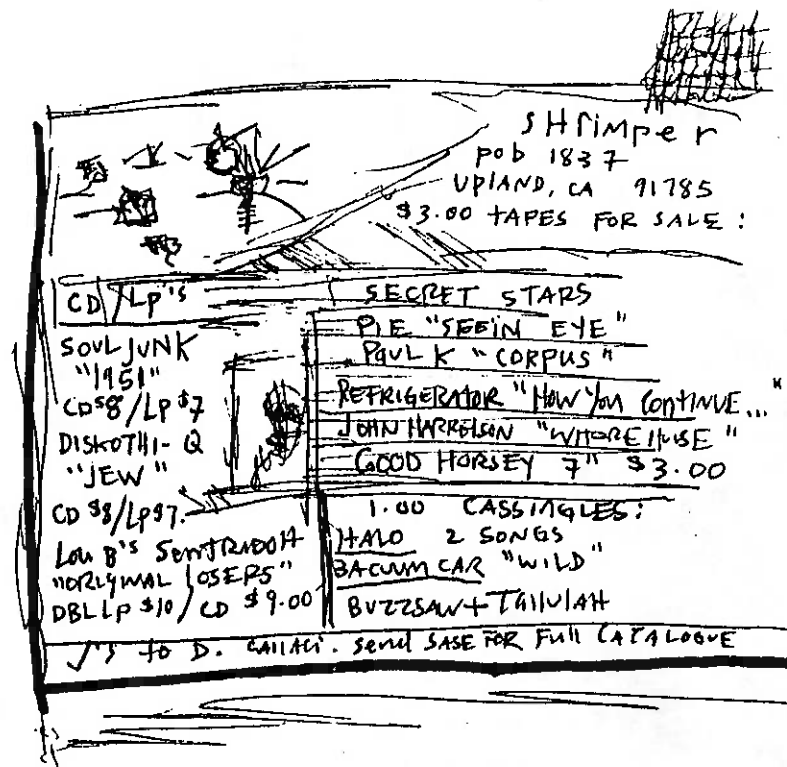
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CD/ALBUM REVIEWS (cont. from page 14)

Little Mermaid Grows Up." Not yet? How about this: Disney-owned faux-alternative label desperately seeking Pumpkins clone? Click.

Gwen Mars' hackneyed, obtuse alterna-metal is so market-driven that it's impossible not to laugh at the sheer capitalism of it all: the familiar strained and whiny vocals, recycled Zeppelin riffs and a rhythm section that sounds like they cut their teeth covering Humble Pie and Blue Cheer. Trashy, but pretty decent trash—if they only had a glimmer of intelligence they'd "rule." May well make it as teen make-out music, which would be interesting to see. (\$3.99)

the Hair and Skin Trading Co. • *Psychedelische Musique* (Freeek)

More like the Hair and Skin Wanking Factory. Lots of ebbing, delayed drones with minimal melodies that sound the alarm for ART, but the erudite-than-thou knot of Neu-worshippers will undoubtedly spring a collective chubby. Hamless. (\$4.99)

Half Japanese • *Hot* (Safe House)

Half Japanese are about magic, that thrilling start you get when you blurt out your crush or narrowly escape misfortune—moments of vulnerability and heightened sensation. Jad Fair generates considerable passion with his incredible free-associative musings. The musical savant shtick is no longer believable, as the band plays with concision. If you're unfamiliar with them, imagine scrappy, spindly and tenacious little fillings of standard garage rock beneath the declamatory poetry of the geekiest guy in your sixth grade class. Now imagine that the poetry was accomplished, playful and inadvertently deep, and that all of the girls had very secret serious infatuations... how could you not root for such a pure, class act? Why buy plain old music when you can buy magic?

For those who don't necessarily genuflect instinctively at the sight of Jad Fair's shadow, this is Half Japanese's strongest full-length since *Charmed Life*. It's very, very good. (\$12.98/FLP)

Helium • *The Dirt of Luck* (Matador)

Previously I wasn't a huge fan of Helium. Weak melodies and Mary Timony's slow guitar left me unsatisfied. All of that's over though: *Dirt of Luck* is a phenomenally good album, a collection of remarkable pop moments and pinpoint skewerings of our gender-fucked culture that combine to form a cohesive and pointed statement. Somewhere between the limp *Pirate Prude* EP and this CD Helium developed a more explicit sense of melody. "Pat's Trick," "Silver Angel" and "Baby's Gone Underground" all thread exquisite little melodic figures through heaps of skanky rock noise—the best part is their new affection for keyboards. "Comet #9" (like "Ghost," the B-side to the "Pat's Trick" 7-inch) is a piano-based slow-motion blur of listless arpeggiation and textural accents.

Timony's cool appraisal of the usual infuriating crap that surrounds all kinds of relationships makes the inclusion of the lyric sheet more than the usual extraneous embarrassment. While I'm not very sympathetic to the impressionistic style of lyric writing (really, folks, narrative stories aren't such a stretch, are they?), her songs nail the shitty, trapped feeling of living in a world with a lot of cruel values. Best line: "I'm fragile like an eggshell, I'm mad as hell." No shit. (\$13.98/FLP)

Henry's Dress • *Henry's Dress* Mini-LP CD (Slumberland)

A real find—a noisy, rumbled and rambling pop band with an obscene overdose of guitar and a gal who tosses off her wispy vocals with terrific disaffection. Nice choruses on the songs, too; this has spent a lot of time on my Discman. I'll bet the members of this band have terrific teeth, brought up in the best homes, etc., etc. This reeks of a brainy response to upper middle class suburban boredom, and I can only hope their burgeoning brattiness and sly pursuit of hit songs gathers enough momentum for them to release more material. Reference point: same bass sound as Helium (yum), same song structures as the early Pastels (coupla chords, slightest of variations from verse to chorus melodies). This is fun music. (\$8.99/FLP/8 songs)

hHead • *Jerk* (I.R.S.)

Pseudo-sensitive, watery R.E.M. The press release makes a big deal out of informing us that "it's pronounced 'head'" but actually I pronounce it 'krapp,' with the hard 'k' sound in the beginning. You say phonetics, I say this is a hHorrible band—let's call the whole thing off. (2¢ is being kind)

Hum • *You'd Prefer An Astronaut* (RCA)

Actually, I'd take a few original ideas over an astronaut, but who's being choosy? Hum are bland, competent alternative rock with little to notice. Not even a good vanilla, this one goes the way of Apollo Thirteen. (\$2.99)

Impala • *Kings of the Strip* (Estrus)

Imagine if a Checkers Speech-era Pat Nixon had gone into heat and scandalously shackled up with Chester Burnett (a/k/a Howlin' Wolf, the best male vocalist of the 1950's). That sort of enticingly upended traditionalism oozes from Impala recordings. Whether it's the post-surf punk rockabilly guitar sprints or slow sax ballads, Impala's instrumentals are extraordinarily lovable combinations of ignorant brute-style strength and refined melodies. Okay: I love 'em. I'm totally bummed that there are only eight songs on this. As the guitar-instrumental/Estrus thing proliferates, it only makes masters like Impala, Galaxy Trio, Huevos Rancheros and Man Or Astroman look better. (\$8.99)

the Innocence Mission • *Bright As Yellow* EP (A&M)

Do the Cowboy Junkies merit their own high-caliber tribute band? If you think so, investigate the

YOU'RE A PATIENT SOUL (turn the page)

CD/ALBUM REVIEWS (cont.)

Innocence Mission. Karen Peris has a perfect voice for spare ballads, all dark passion and sensuality, and the band quietly and tastefully runs the songs behind her so that she can rasp and warble away. Two of the four tracks were recorded at the band's home and sound much better than the overly treated studio-produced album tracks. Slow, pretty, and capable of a flirtatious languor, the Innocence Mission create lovely country rock. Just like the Cowboy Junkies. (\$4.99/4 songs)

Rickie Lee Jones • *Naked Songs* (Reprise)

Gotta wonder about the Rickie-come-lately market angle of an "unplugged" style album from an artist who's not exactly known for being "plugged in," but I suppose everyone's entitled to pretend their busking if Mary Lou Lord can pull her manipulative stunts on gullible failed yuppies and clueless collegians in Harvard Square. This record is bluesy, depressing and has the fearful, ominous ennu that accompanies middle age (don't ask me which birthday I just celebrated). Middle age also brings a bittersweet levity, though, and that graceful humility helps this record a lot.

While Jones' voice is pushed too hard in the upper register, there's such depth to the way she sings her lyrics. Sit back on the couch, let Rickie sing and wonder where it all went wrong. Were it not for the occasional strident wail, this'd be a great record. (\$6.99)

June of '44 • *Engine Takes to Water* (Quarterstick)

Horribly self-conscious take on rhythmic and noisy punk that has wonderful music and ugly pretensions of poetic weight. So as I listen to and appreciate the bright and slinky guitar, I cringe and flinch as the vocalist (sorry, no press kit check, you can call Touch and Go if you really need to know) sings about singing (gag!), and his "art." Nope.

There is that nagging problem of the excellent music though, which is especially pertinent because the record consists of eight long tracks, many of which have long instrumental spells (mercifully). The Alaskan bush is very beautiful, but then again it's cold as hell, too. June of '44 has that same sensation of mixed blessing. In the final analysis I'll probably listen to this very little. (\$3.99)

Kickstand • *Kickstand* (Queenie)

From the label that brought us the amazing Cobalt 7" comes this long debut CD—23 tracks with the inclusion of past EP *On Training Wheels*, which is a great deal. Simple, pretty songs stretching between

post-punk and good-natured folk, wrapped in foil paper along with something tasteful from the local florist. Slightly singsong, reliant upon glimmering repetitions of chiming guitar. With a little more consistency, Kickstand will be joining their forebears in putting out classic albums.

So why call themselves Kickstand? It's the most misleading name, reeking as it does of knit hats, Converse One Stars and Toughskins. I'm just grateful that there's no fucking bunny imagery—I'm so tired of delicate indie pop tunes ruined by a ga-ga goo-goo mentality. Could be their NYC locus, but Kickstand manage to circumvent cutesy regressive drivel. Neat trick, that, near to genius as the absolutely unforgettable backing vocal refrains of "How to Make a Girl Cry." (\$12.98/FLP)

Das Klown • *Laughing Stalk* (Posh Boy)

Starts two strikes down by advising the listener to "play this loud" on the back of the CD, usually an indicator of jock-strap mentality. They also use the image of clowns, a wing of the sapiens family that firmly believe should be hunted in a two month open season for a \$6 special stamp on your hunting license. Das Klown are a straight up Sunday afternoon all-ages retro hardcore band, somewhere towards the middle of the pack in terms of talent and ability. (\$2.99)

Knapsack • *silver sweepstakes* (Alias)

Some people wish upon a star, others wish they were an Oscar Mayer Weiner, and Knapsack wish they were the Archers of Loaf. I bet they were wondering which padded chair in the conference room Eric Bachmann sat in when they visited the Alias offices in L.A. But the Archers are a pretty

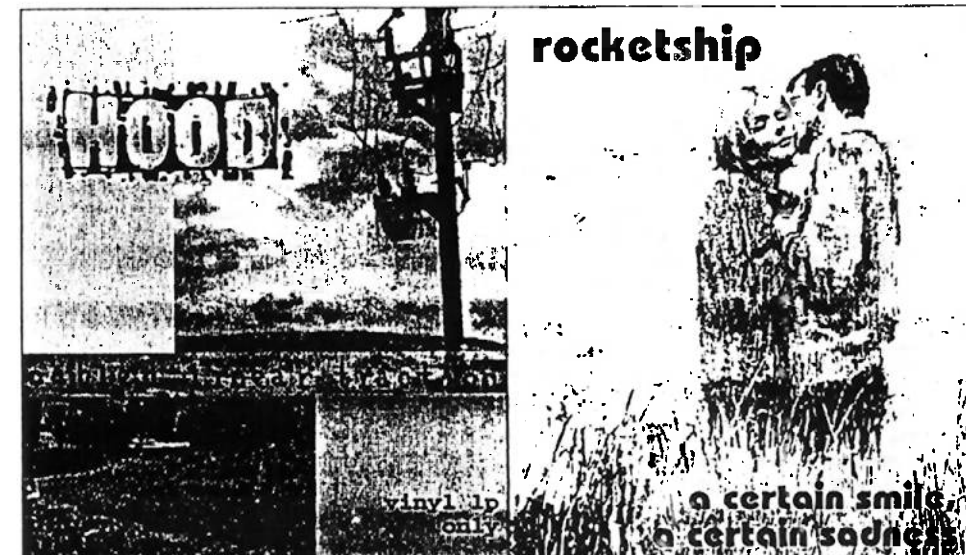
good band, and a sneakily clever bunch of guys, which Knapsack aren't. You've already guessed: power chords without the sass; hoarse vocals without the pathos. The most half- (or quarter-) assed thing about this record is its production sound. Airtight and anal, not a thing leaks out of place, choreographed chaos always looks most fake. Not to say that I doubt the band members' sincerity. Their A & R rep, well that's a different story. Sad, sad epilogue: at the very end of the last song (title track), Knapsack play a little repeating loop that's very faint and pretty; it's the only really interesting moment on the record. (\$3.99)

LaBradford • *A Stable Reference* (Kranky)

These guys have no idea how tremendously fortunate they are that they don't suck, because this record has importance as one of its agenda items. And while



And while we're here, would anyone mind filling me in on WHAT THE FUCK HAPPENED WITH JULIAN COPE?



vinyl lp — \$8 US, \$11 elsewhere, cd — \$10 US, \$14 elsewhere

Slumberland records

box 14731, berkeley, ca 94712
<http://www.denizen.com/trout/slumberland/>

LaBradford's big songs of roaming keyboards and ghostly, gloaming guitars are a damned sight beyond Yanni, this gets uncomfortably close to a gallery piece, and not in a good way. Still, LaBradford are excellent musicians, affecting and spooky. Glorious wankfest! (\$10.88)

the Lordz of Brooklyn • *All In the Family* (American)

Well, well, well... jock my jammy. anhedonia finally gets serviced with a little rap music. Too bad it's stale; though "American Made" is a fun, rolling single. (\$3.99)

Love Battery • *Straight Freak Ticket* (Atlas/Polygram)

Love Battery are under the mistaken impression that they're stars; they couldn't have been more rude at a scheduled joint interview with me and Boston Rock. Their publicist is a pretty nice person, though. (See you on your way down, and have fun dealing with Irving Azoff, I hear he's a sweetheart).

the Luxurious Bags • *Frayed Knots* (Twisted Village)

This is about texture and distilled, minimal pop hooks. Heatwave hallucinations and basic themes re-worked and explored combine for a carefully for ged,

if illusory product. The truth behind the curtain is that, like the first Jesus and Mary Chain album, real songs are buried beneath the feedback. Fried and fantastic, Luxurious Bags push psychedelic pop back through the effects pedals one more time... because they can. (\$11.99/FLP)

Another precious album on Twisted Village proves that some of the overhype maybe isn't. Yummy, gooey drug rock here, all hooks and mid-price texture, attained through the tired and true route of effects, effects and more effects. However, real songs lurk beneath the grinding din, and the momentary mid-song keyboard break in "Lost Wallet" would draw the attention of Elton John. Illusory minimalism and overall prettiness put this on shopping lists. (\$7.99/7 songs/dunno the list price)

Two drafts of the same review for the price of one! What will I think of next! Quitting!

Magic Hour • *Will They Turn You On Or Will They Turn On You?* (Twisted Village)

Magic Hour have been an enigma. They're absolutely dreadful live, spewing distorted noise that's in a realm beyond boring, as aggressively dreadful as the *Fellowship of the Ring* trilogy. Whenever I heard their recordings, I couldn't believe it was the same band; pretty and slow, psychedelic grooves of sunsplashed guitar soloing.

THE EGO TRIP CONTINUES! (turn the page)

CD/ALBUM REVIEWS (cont.)

Will They . . . begins with five songs organized around the poised rhythm playing of former Galaxie 500 members Danion Krukowski and Naomi Yang—spare but never lacking. Unlike the shows, you can actually hear the guitars of Kate Biggar and Wayne Rogers, and Rogers has a pleasant, low-key baritone voice. The mix level is not as high as a lot of rock records, which accentuates the considerable dynamics.

All that said, an enormous question remains: how much guitar heroics do you want to hear? Because the sixth and last track is a twenty minute excursion into post-Jeff Beck freakout that gives new dimension to the expression "seemingly endless." Halfway through there's a jarring edit back to the vocal track. It's acid-rock, and I enjoy it, but it isn't everyone's bag. (\$6.99)

Man Or Astroman? • *Project Infinity* (Estrus)

Profoundly exciting fillips of absolutely pure rock and roll, the 15 or 16 (my CD player & the artwork disagree) tracks on this CD offer more positive statements for existence than a tentful of revival trippers. Here's the deal: enormously reverbed lead guitar scampers nimbly down the fretboard, hopped-up and hepped-out drumbeats hot on their trail. Almost all of the songs are instrumental and built to stay that way, although the critically placed sci-fi dialog samples ratchet the drama up another notch. Fast, economical, and full to bursting with raw sex-power, this is a record that both proudly represents its genre (post-Morricone neo-western galloping guitar instrumentals) and easily surpasses the limits of pigeonholing. If rock n' roll guitar has ever excited you, you should get this. Like several other Estrus products, this is a must-have, a brilliant record. (\$14.99/FLP/buy this, look smart)

Barbara Manning • *Sings With the Original Artists* (Feel Good All Over)

Mid-'93 sessions with former Young Marble Giant/current man-about-indie-pop Stuart Moxham. Eleven breezy scenes starting Manning's impeccable, throaty alto, rich with melody, experience and emo-

tional intensity. The arrangements are spare: a little scratchy rhythm picking, some synth swooshes, and percussion tracks (many of them programmed) that just barely exist. Nice horns on "Optimism Is Its Own Reward." Less a rock record than those made with Manning's main outfit the SF Seals, the quietude doubles the focus on her substantial vocal abilities. Her reading here of "Cry Me A River" is nothing short of perfection, elevating her to the status of Dusty Springfield for three beatific minutes. All the faux-sophisticate "lounge" bands should hear this and think hard. Sadly, only one of the songs is hers (blame a pervasive Mary Lou Lord influence?), and many of them lack the dramatic choruses of Manning's best work (covers or originals). (\$7.99, mostly for "Cry.")



The queen of
"National Hot Dog
Week"

You will always be beautiful to me.
(I needed the money, please understand)

Eric Matthews • *It's Heavy In Here* (Sub Pop)

A firm, placid record of newer Steely Dan. Matthews was involved in the Cardinal album, and it shows in the clipped, studied vocals, clean pop hooks, and sophisticated songwriting. This is pure pop, English wood-paneled library version, lots of songs with piano and brass and singer with a voice so assured and pretty you just know that his wardrobe is amazing.

I hope to hell that this kind of stuff benefits from Sub Pop's new relationship with Warner Brothers. This is inventive and rich, the sort of challenging CD that compensates for the fuzzy chord herd of crap merchants bombarding us with repetitious drivel. One by one it's not so bad, but en masse . . . Sorry, back to the issue at hand. While Matthews will gain direct entry into the "indie-pop" camp, know that this record does not tread the cloying, juvenile side of that ghetto. Suave but overlooked, that's the party line. (\$12.98/FLP)

Milkmilne • *Braille* (Choke)

More thundering music that makes a mistake in hiding the slow, spacy stuff towards the back of the album — which is really the only part of interest. Nevertheless, the songs that work have a bizarre, evil feel that's seductive and powerful. Too many lumps of old Black Flag ruin a promising foundation of tarry noise. (\$4.99)

Monster Magnet • *Dopes To Infinity* (A&M)

My poor little anhedonic ears have been besieged lately with all manner of bastardized nouveaux metal. If only they had the good sense to simply step aside and get out of Monster Magnet's way, the musical world would be a better place. Unrepentantly bludgeoning, Monster Magnet are monolithic metal, but far from obtuse. I adore this record's regal dismissal of current production trends. This overdubbed, reworked, EQ'd and processed more than your average hot dog or Boston album, and . . . it . . . sounds . . . pissa! Wicked pissa! (\$13.98/FLP)

Motorhome • *Sex Vehicle* (Dirt)

An excellent collection of up-tempo, zig zagging rock with gravelly guitar and cute girlish vocals. Motorhome aren't pushing any envelopes, but their levels of technical ability and sophistication are superlative. There are enough off-beat touches to create a nice intersong dynamic. This is a strong record, colorful and tuneful and song-oriented. (\$7.99)

Negativland • *The Starting Line* (Seeland)

Don't know why people would find a recording of an auto trivia radio show entertaining — they're certainly no Click and Clack. If this passes for clever cultural commentary then that makes me fucking Noam Chomsky. (99¢ for the neat keychain inside)

Outcrowd • *Healer* (Black-out)

Big, loud, manly power trio with histrionic arena vocals, way up in the mix, too, so it's easy to hear how dumb the lyrics are. This kind of stuff always breaks my heart: I'll bet that your average Outcrowd member is a lot nicer than any three Matador bands combined — but holy shit, their music's loud and dumb. (Give the change to a panhandler)

Overpass • *Manhattan Beach* (Smells Like)

Muted, bent post-punk with all the markings of a thoroughbred (niggling lead guitar, solid drumming, abstruse melodies), but pinned to the rail coming down the homestretch by deliberate cleverness. True rock dwindles when intellect supersedes emotion. Overpass

are too well-thought-out and not heartfelt enough. But they are good. (\$6.99)

Panda • *Panda* (Kokenop)

Competent, cool pop-rock. Derivative of all white suburban sixties genres, and they sound as if they're enjoying themselves. The hyper-shininess of the songs sometimes recalls unpleasant shopping mall holiday scenes, but Panda have a nice way with vocal harmonies and jangly guitars. Not a speck of arty pretension — it's all social. When you sound this nice, I guess communicating angst becomes a tad moot. (\$3.99)

Pavement • *Wowwee Wowwee* (Matador)

It took me about six months to really get into Pavement's last album, *Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain* — all the college and commercial alternative radio airplay for "Cut Your Hair" and the subsequent bickering backlash of fanzine losers like yours truly put me off. The hooks also lacked the swooping, infectious ease of their debut classic, *Slanted and Enchanted*, and took a while to germinate. These days I don't listen to the radio much, though, so I had the luxury of cozying up with *Wowwee Wowwee* as soon as I got it home.

It's pretty good, a little "heavier" than their past many pet sounds. Vocalist and guitarist Steven Malkmus still comes up with some catchy melodies and interesting snippets of lyrical imagery.

At 18 tracks the CD not only has room to grow, but to sprawl, each little thorny shoot of fuzzy, dissonant bass just so much more encroaching sonic bramble. A tangled mess, for sure, but worth the pricks for the berries.

Best moment is the R.E.M.-ish "Father To A Sister Of A Thought," with a comely chord progression finished off with a syrupy layer of pedal steel guitar. There are a lot of parallels between Pavement and R.E.M., and I'd peg this CD as their *Fables of the Reconstruction*: rural, difficult, psychologically intense and often emotionally affecting in an arty, suburban white-boy way. (\$9.99)



A favorite of American shoppers.

MORE PRICELESS OPINIONS (turn the page)

CD/ALBUM REVIEWS (cont.)

the Phunk Junkeez • *Injected* (Atlantic)

Uh-oh, rap metal. Some day when I'm feeling as empty headed as your average Phunk Junkee, I'm gonna sit down and figure out why this style of music always makes me laugh my ass off. Fantastically, amazingly, a lyric sheet's included—and I'm damn near crying. Try these on for size:

Stand up
You don't have to be afraid
Get down
Love is like a hurricane
Street boy
Ya [sic] know I never could be tamed
Ya [sic] better believe it
Guilty
Until proven innocent
Whiplash
Heavy metal accident
Rock on
Fuck the president
'cuz I love it.

Ooooooh,
they so bad!
Idle thought:
those last two
lines; is this
something else
Hilary has had
to 'accept?'
Hmmm...

I know
that people in
the music in-
dustry read this
shitty rag — see if you can a copy from someone at Atlantic; you'll thank me later. If you have to pay for this, do something more useful with your money, like maybe lighting it on fire. This is easily the worst record of the year. (Somehow, worse than worthless; an actively bad thing)

Picasso Trigger • *Bipolar Cowboy* (Alias)

The months and years go by, and some things just don't change. The sky is blue, the Peso is unstable, Republicans lie about who their policies benefit, and Picasso Trigger still write middle-of-the-road loud rock songs. Why not toss a gratuitous David Byrne quote in? "Same as it ever was, same as it ever was." Heavily modulated guitar and strangled female vocals (a far cry from PJ Harvey or even Mecca Normal's Jean Smith) are just too pedestrian as an opening gambit, and the Picasso Trigger don't even deliver a good throw-away single. I do respect their perseverance, though, and if you like this kind of crunchy stuff, this is moderately pleasing. (\$5.99)

Portastatic • *Scrapbook* EP (Merge)

Portastatic is the solo project of Mac MacCaughan of Superchunk, recording in a less for-

mal manner than with his full-time gig. Over the past year, though, the line between the two has become blurred as Portastatic releases proliferate and move beyond the initial bedroom 4-track jobs that first appeared (hello, *Eighteen Wheeler*), and Superchunk made a move towards more sensitive dynamics and slower songs on *Foolish*.

Scrapbook is the closest yet to presenting Portastatic as a full band. Of the five songs, four have the standard indie sound and lineup. In fact, MacCaughan's never been a studio innovator so much as a man with a gift for growing magnificent melodic sprawls from the seed of a simple, central hook. His gift shines, from the giddy whirl of "St. Elmo's Fire" (which features Ira Kaplan and Georgia Hubley of Yo La Tengo) to the glum, country-inflected crawl of "Why Pinch Yourself." The fifth track is the most unusual, a keyboard-dominated loop song that builds up from and down to a gentle five-note phrase. Every song on the

EP is interesting and good, and the packaging (by Bruce Licher of IPR) justifies the priciness. (\$7.99/5 songs)

Poster Children • *Junior Citizen* (Sire/WB)

Big, warm rock sound—this

was recorded in studio used by Smashing Pumpkins for *Gish* and has the same citric guitar. Billy Corgan is a more melodic and fluid guitarist, though, and once again a Poster Children album sags under the crushing weight of unimaginative playing. Nonetheless, some of the songs are attractive hard rock, and the rhythm playing is especially fun. "Wide Awake" hints at the desperation that distinguishes good Midwestern bands; the hook might be simple, but it works. Unfortunately, the rest of the tunes lack its scope and tease more than satisfy. (\$2.99)

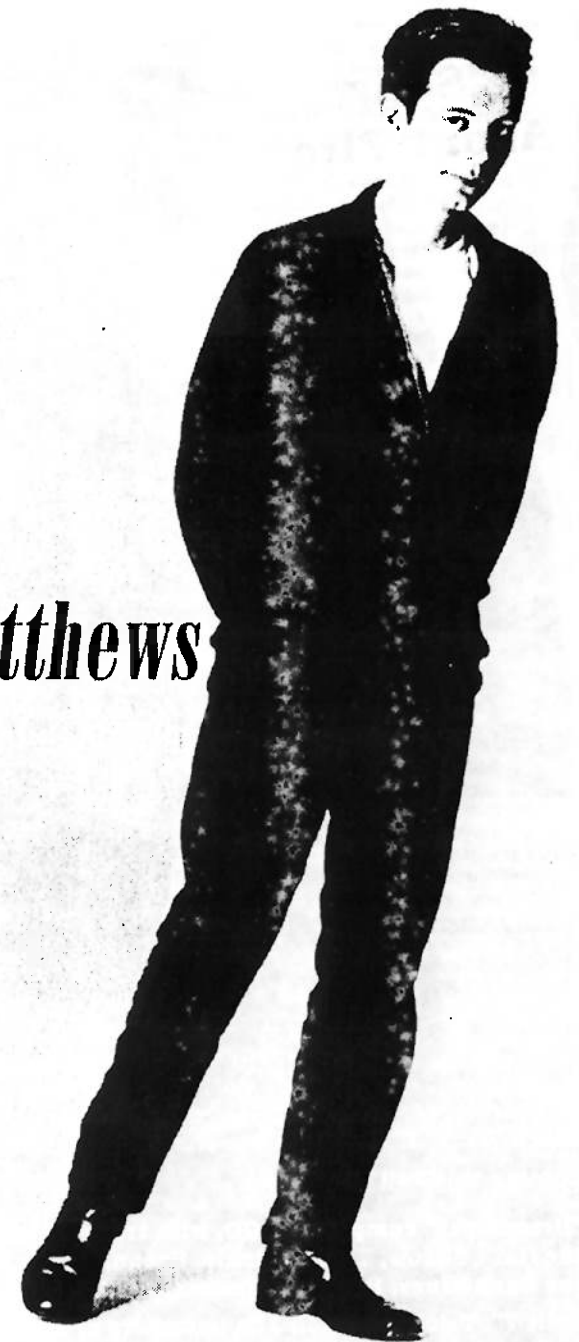
Racecar • *Girlish* (Queenie)

The best Velocity Girl album in a long time. Sarah Shannon's dropped the whining tendencies, Archie Moore's use of effects is much more restrained, and the band seem much more focused on the songs' airy jouissance. The only problem is that they insist on calling themselves Racecar for some reason...

Seriously, this is another very strong record of our current indie-rock/pop on Queenie, a label quickly "IS THIS ONE OF THOSE 'FANZINES' I'VE READ SO MUCH ABOUT?" (cont. on page 25)



Eric Matthews



The Mountain Goats

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CD/ALBUM REVIEWS (cont. from page 22)

building a reputation for releasing melodic, near-fey full-lengths by bands that merit the format. (\$14.99/FLP)

Railroad Jerk • One Track Mind (Matador)

I find Matador's embrace of white junk-blues funny. Railroad Jerk, Come, attempted signing Royal Trux and the impeccably marketed Jon Spencer Ivy League Shameposion all affect varying degrees of bayou diffidence and an overly precise, calculating soulfulness that smacks of arrogance and the sort of cultural overreach that makes folk art into gallery pieces, then bourgeois decorating theme, and finally into mass culture leitmotif. Come can flat out rock, Royal Trux have pop smarts to spare, and Spencer sings as Keanu Reeves acts: oozing middle-brow male sensuality like a frat boy with a couple of art courses under his belt. The label's roster seems to have a direct impact on perennial younger brother act Railroad Jerk, who unwisely ape Spencer's geek-ro spiz on songs like "Riverboat," which sucks. "Home Hang" is also too mannered.

But here's good news: Marcellus Hall can really sing, especially when he drops the Calvin Klein lip-curling pose. "What Did You Expect?" has strains of pure rock gleaming from its core. "Bang the Drum" has a broad shouldered, gruff appeal. The album also has the best production job I've heard on a blues rock album in quite some time. A nice dry drum sound slaps around extremely clear, flat guitar and vocal sources. No emasculating compression, no massive chorus or delay effects. Just some vintage twangy single note guitar, a harp flourish here and there, and gurgling bass. Unfortunately, fully half the songs are marred by the backsliding towards fudged redneck disingenuity, and teases more than consummates the proposition. (\$8.99)

Red Aunts • #1 Chicken (Epitaph)

Life gets stranger every damn day... The (really nice) folks at Epitaph wasted no time running out and spending the Green Day/Ofspring/Rancid money on everything their heart desires, including, apparently, extravagant packaging items like the coal-black heart-shaped box (a reference?) that this CD came packed in. My hats off to them.

The Red Aunts are quasi-tuneful, caffeinated punk with nasty female vocals and a fantastically adept rhythm section. What the neo Chuck Berry guitar licks



lack in originality (quite a bit, really, but this ain't no Pat Metheny album), is made up for by the frenetic stop-starts of the bass & drums. The "old-school hardcore" trappings are a little forced (i.e. 10th generation Lee Ving vocal stylings when the lead singer has a perfectly fine voice), but the excitement level is completely organic.

Produced by Brett Gurewitz to sound offhand and small (the guitar sounds garaged, not hangared) — the songs are two minutes or less, with very little lead time for each track. The uniformity of the songs both helps maintain a certain uptempo charm, and yet also races the short album length to the finish line in terms of my patience. (\$6.99)

the Red Crayola • Amor and Language (Drag City)

What's in a label's cache? Enough, apparently, to float this overworked collection of top-heavy psych-blues out into the bay. Yeah, "T.I.I." is a marvelous, driving anthem. And "Hard On Through the Summer" is engaging. But much of this wouldn't see the light of day if Mayo Thompson hadn't produced so many famous records, and no one would notice if it didn't come out on Drag City. The most noteworthy aspect of this album is the artwork's appropriation of the style of the Antwerp Design School. (\$3.99)

Royal Trux • Thank You (Virgin)

No more drugs, no more fucked-flat star-trip excursions either—damn. I liked the off-balance torpor and bleary disenfranchisement of earlier Trux offerings *Twin Infinitives* and 1993's more structural *Cats+Dogs*. Royal Trux' newest incarnation doesn't suck, but the tighter band and neo-AOR stylings are nearer Black Crowes than I wish to be.

"Ray-O-Vac" is a big, boss single, will help sell the record, and in general reaffirms Neil Haggerty and Jennifer Herrema's songwriting skills; many a folk should toss it onto a mixed tape for beach days. *Thank You* hits its snags at the preproduction stage, which is when most people make the decision to have a nice,

fully produced record. I'm no lo-fi fetishist, but as Royal Trux veer to Bad Company (who were, in their own right, a kick-ass band), I miss the oldies (like when the Talking Heads followed *Speaking In Tongues* with *Little Creatures*). Tough titty for me—this is an above-average blues-rock record with mid-tempo riff-rock galore. (\$7.99).

Saturnline 60 • Autoguide (Dirt)

The mixture of country and shoegazer pop steers one towards the questionable appellation "cuntgazer,"

LESS FAT, MORE CRAP (turn the page)



CD/ALBUM REVIEWS (cont.)

which adequately depicts the sleazy kicks herein. Lumbering traditional song structures with decent cops of Neil Young, nothing new, never majestic, but consistently pleasing by taking the easy way out. Ringing guitars and echoing, pallid soft-guy vox. Above average, and creepingly catchy. (\$7.99)

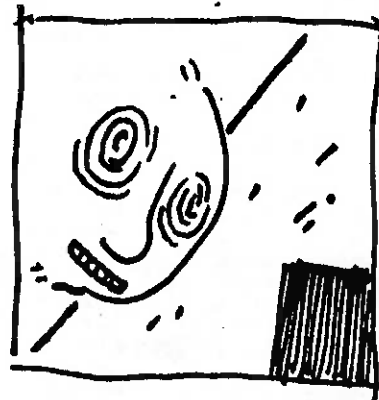
Saturnine • *Wreck At Pillar Point* (Dirt)

I guess they dropped the "60." Grand-gesture homemade dream-pop with a painfully stretched vocalist and a certain limited talent for picking out a minor-key melody or two, Saturnine certainly aren't poised for much more than status as college-rock fodder, and I'd dismiss them completely were it not for some nice guitar playing and their straining effort to make pretty music. Still, though, this is much stronger than their previous efforts, and Saturnine are moving towards the style and sound of mid-period Church, which is encouraging. "Summer Was A Waste" is a genuine single; if all of the songs on the record were half this good Saturnine and Dirt would be rubbing their hands together with glee.

Recorded at Studio Red with Adam Lasus, the guitar sound is a little bit too dry for the band's song-writing style. What works (incredibly well, I might add) for Versus and Scarce is not necessarily sauce for Saturnine, if you follow my mixed metaphor. Saturnine should record in a studio that can dress them up a bit — it'd be worth the price. (\$7.99)

Scarce • *Deadsexy* (A&M)

The long-awaited and mucho hyped debut from Providence's reigning rockers (okay, maybe Six Finger Satellite have an argument). There are several fantastic moments on *Deadsexy*: the fadeout on "Freakshadow;" Chick Grating's vocal performance on the second verse of "Glamorizing Cigarettes;" the harpy-like shrieks on "All Sideways." It's funny, because when they play live Joyce Raskin steals the spotlight with her Pete Townshend stage antics, but on these recordings (as opposed to earlier singles), it's obvious that Chick Grating is the core of the band. A soulful and engaging singer and a melodically inventive songwriter, Grating wrings new prettiness from his distinctive variations on familiar chord phrases. From the vast hook of "All Sideways" (neatly swiped from the Laverne & Shirley theme, as pointed out by Hugh Dickey of Pie) to the tidy aperçus of "Days Like This," this is one remarkable classic rock album. I love this



record. There, I said it. I feel much better now. (\$14.98/FLP)

Release has been delayed as Grating recovers from a near-fatal aneurysm.

The Sea and Cake • *Nassau* (Thrill Jockey)

I love this album ... and did from the very first moments of "Nature Boy," the evanescent, surging lead track. So many bands on this label (and in the city of Chicago) are about being Serious Musicians, it makes you wonder: Tortoise, Gastr del Sol, Seam ... what they share is a distributor (the increasingly amazingly cool Touch n' Go), a loose geographic orientation centered on Humboldt Park, and Brad Wood/the Idful Music Studios.

The Sea and Cake's extensive musical vocabulary allows them to throw jazzy trickles of deep aqua bliss over several layers of alternately wispy and driving rock music that hides their pretensions and soars free and pure in a love of melody that is so, so missing from a lot of popular music.

Much better than last year's eponymous debut, *Nassau* has songs that are moody, memorable and enriching. "Parasol" begins with a sinuous vocal on the verse, nicely shadowed by a morosely bowed cello; when the bridge drops into the pretty little chorus (replete with violin), I'm awed — this is such accomplished writing. And while there are a few moments of clogged overintellectualization, I really don't want to complain since I consider anyone erring in that direction to be exploring a positive tip.

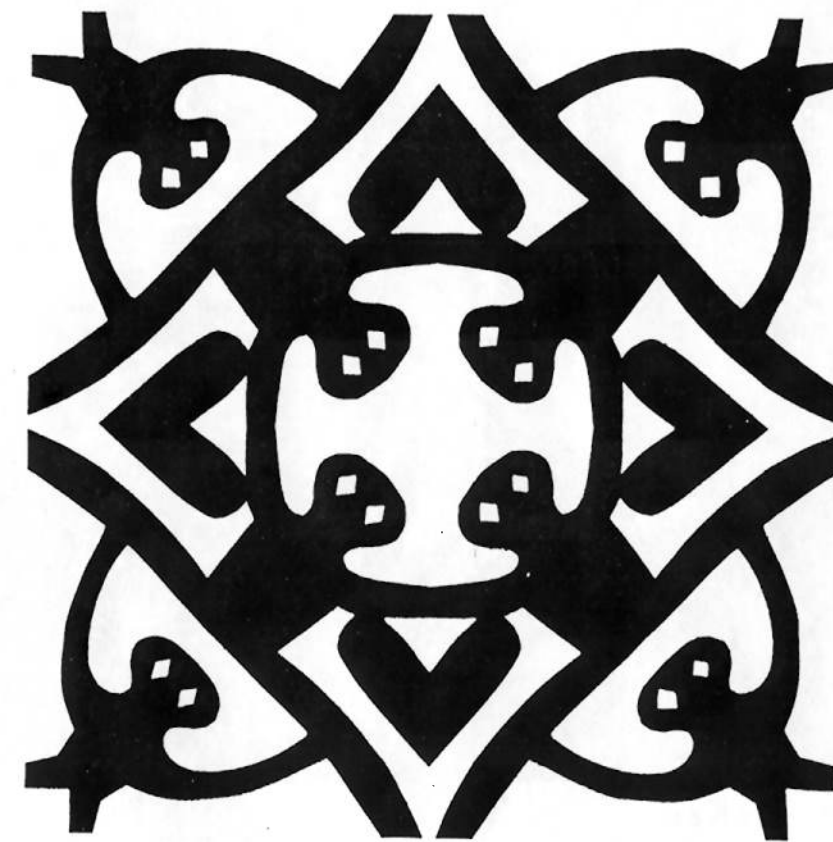
If you like pretty mid tempo rock without gimmickry, this is your meal ticket. The packaging's also pretty nice; rough representational images (photographic and pastel) of animals on the front and a simple sunrise (sunset?) scene on the back. (\$13.98/FLP)

Seam • *Are You Driving Me Crazy?* (Touch n' Go)

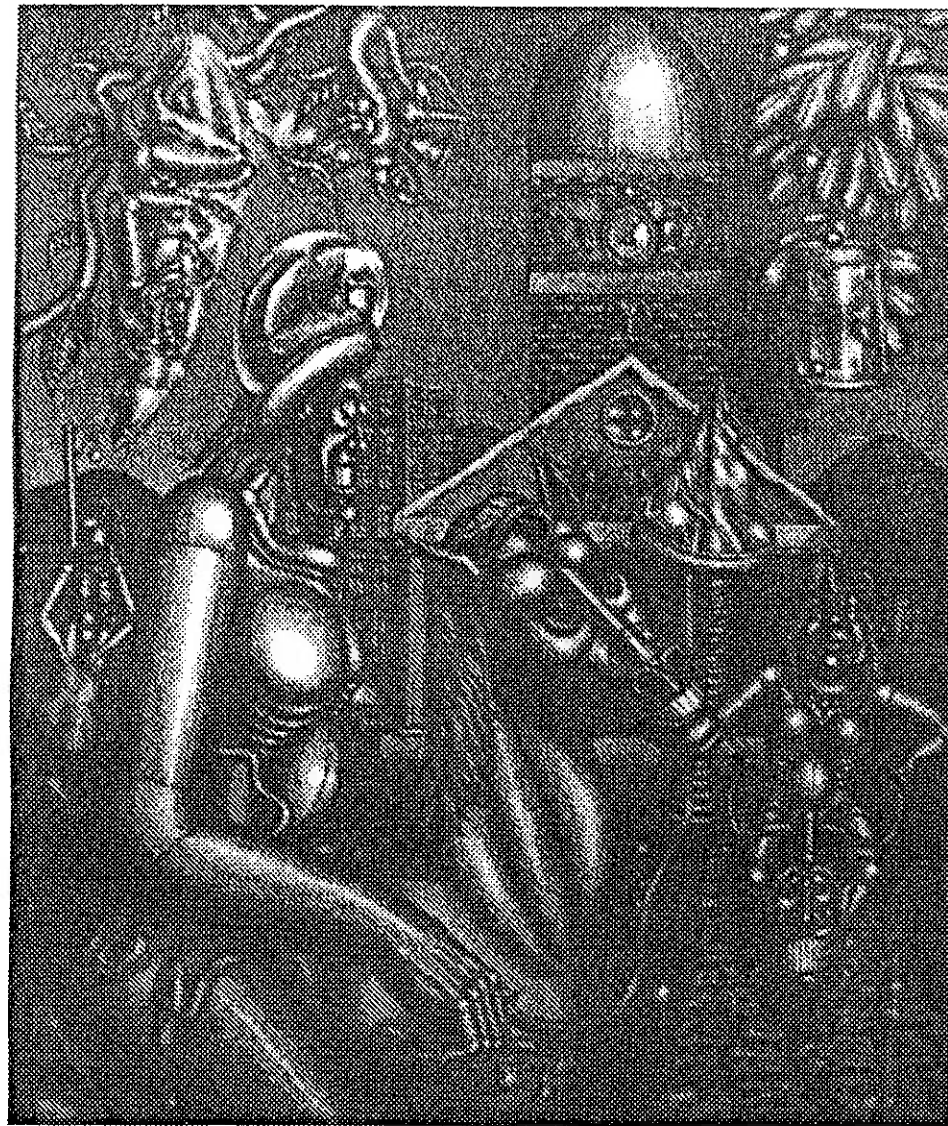
Sooyoung Park has matured as a songwriter, and *Are You Driving Me Crazy* is his notice to rock fans that he's to be taken as seriously as a modern rock songwriter can be. This is as fine an album as you'll find this year in the tired and overworked "indie rock" genre, with accomplished playing and a particularly riveting singing performance. It's exciting to see a band grow, and it looks like whatever awkwardness dogged Seam's last album *The Problem With Me*, is long gone.

Song by song, the album unfolds like a fantastic letter from a long-lost former lover, full of complicated, muted feelings and shared understandings; part of

anhedonia sketchbook



jad fair



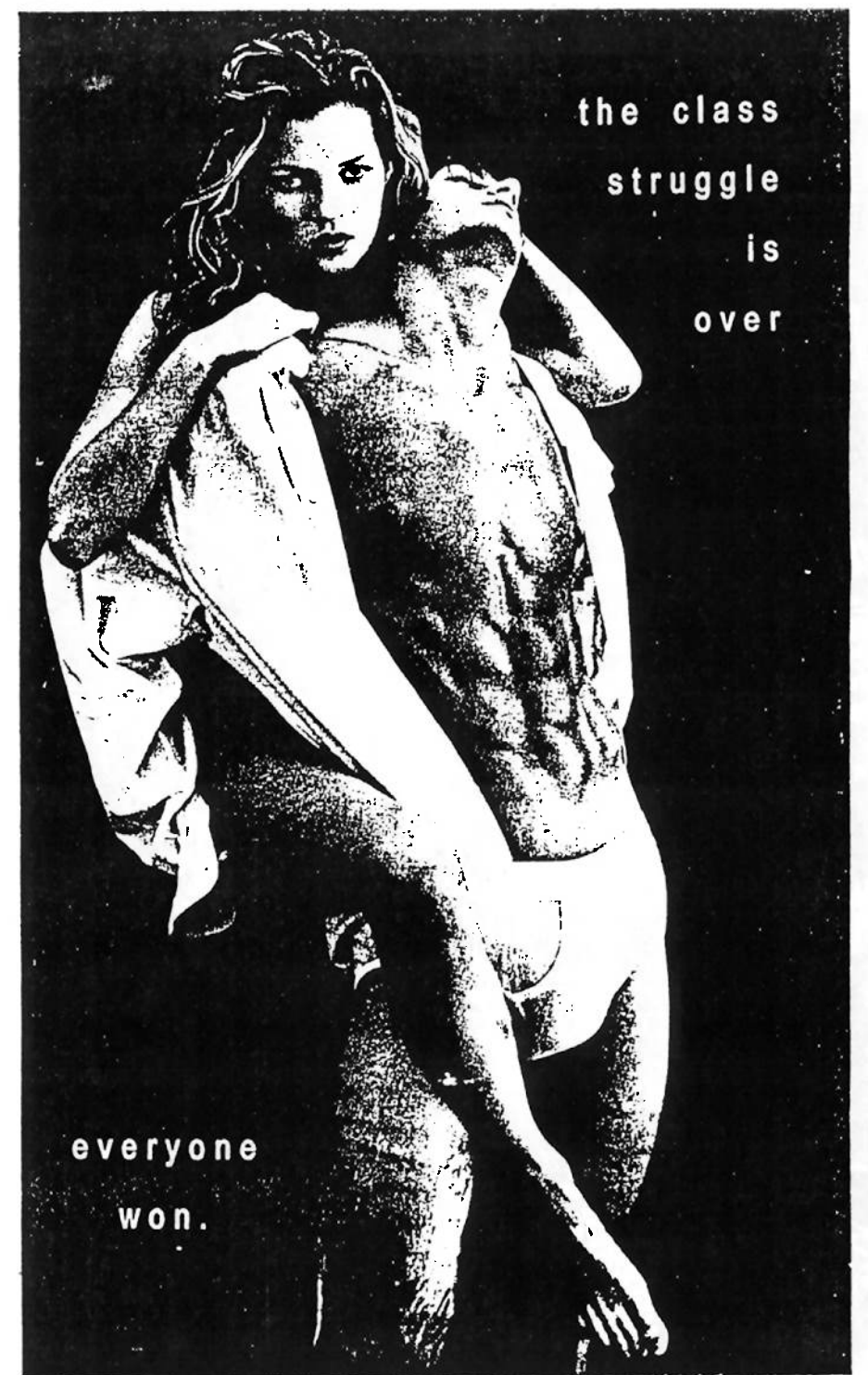
Tom McKee



ivan



ron rege



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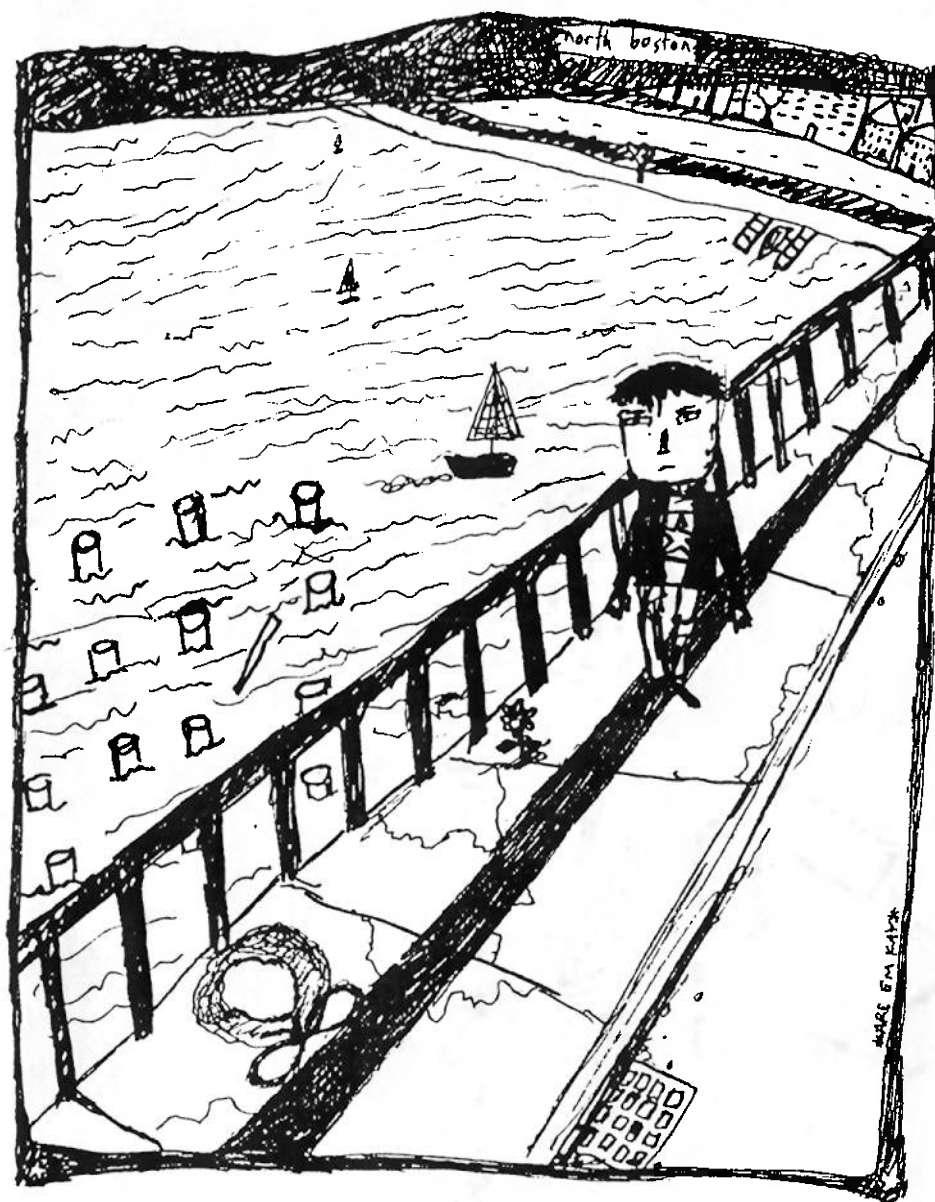
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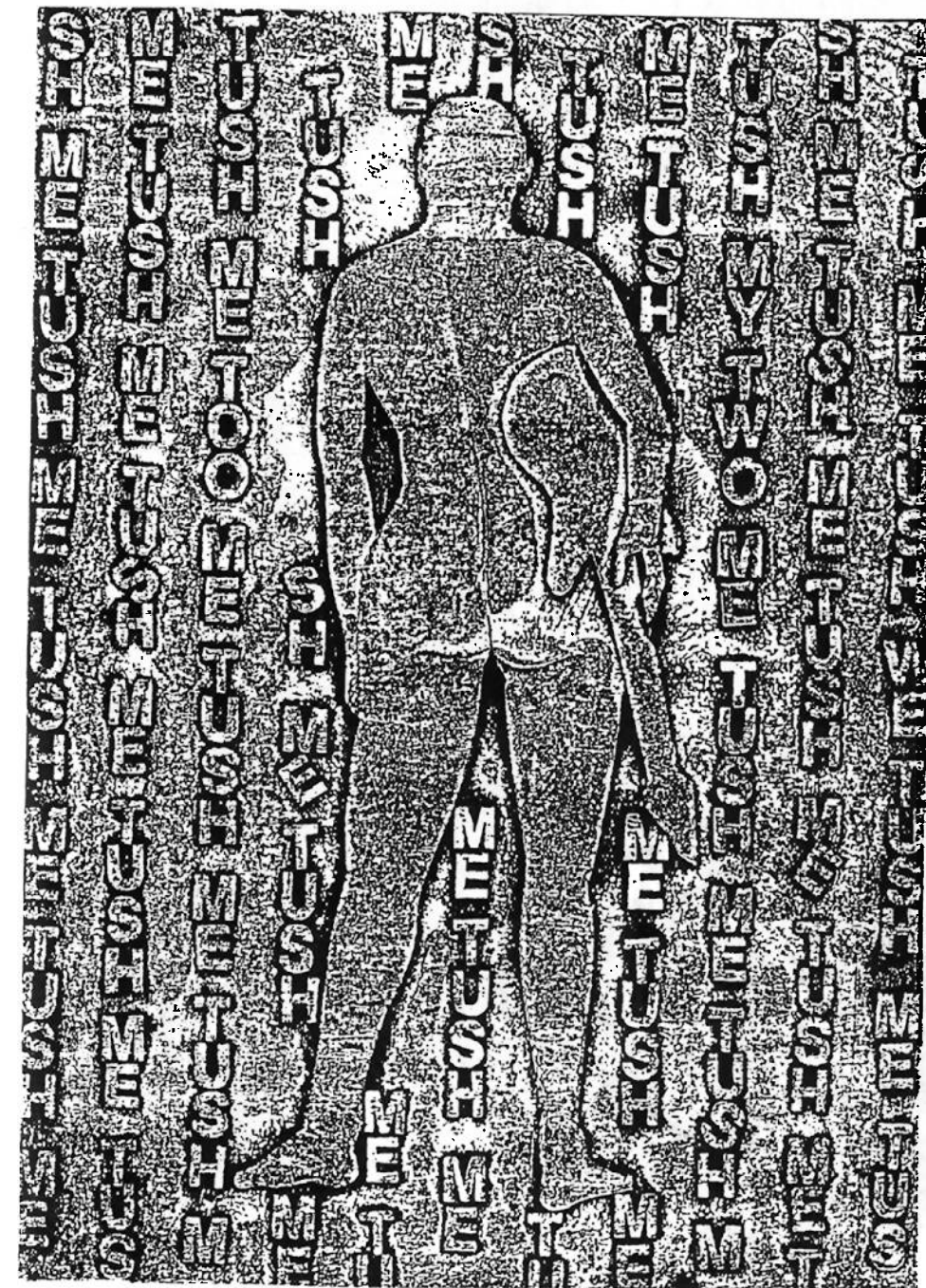
jake austen



dave nelson



ryan klauk



harold cuniff



w. gosnell



jad fair

A WARM PORCH
ON A TUESDAY
EVE.
WE'RE TALKING
SLOW AS TO
NOT LEAVE
THE DETAILS
OUT.
DID YOU SAY
SOMETHING?
(BUT I didn't
ASK)

COULD YOU WHISPER IT AGAIN SLOWER

dennis callaci



Park's exceptional talent is an eye for the resonant quality of common detail. From the palpable frustrations of the opener "Berlitz," a song about fucked-up communication that also features agonizingly gorgeous guitar, to the deeply sorry lamentations of "Sometimes I Forget," Park delivers on his intentions of examining the unresolved and often impenetrable and baffling issues of relationships. It's an old idea, but you have to be impressed by someone who can match a lyric like "sometimes I forget and your problems don't seem real to me" to an appropriately glum but catchy melody.

As consistently powerful as Park's songwriting is, *Are You Driving Me Crazy* is also remarkable as the strongest production Brad Wood and Casey Rice have done since Liz Phair's first album. The engineering is particularly strong; some of the guitar sounds you can practically taste, they're so full. Featuring excellent performances of intelligent and affecting songs recorded with care, precision and talent, Seam have turned in an album that will live beyond the minimal attention span of the pop landscape. This is damn good... (\$13.99/FLP)

Seaweed • *Spanaway* (Hollywood)

Overly loud but affable hard rock. Seaweed have been improving since their earlier Sub Pop days, and their guitar grandstanding is diverting, but the incessant howl of Aaron Stauffer's vocals chafes me like burlap undies. Most new "hard" bands are too self-

consciously cerebral — Seaweed should take their cue. Still, if you're jerking off with the frat boys, you could do worse. (\$4.99)

Fun fact: signed with Hollywood for three albums and a \$1.5 MILLION DOLLAR ADVANCE. So if you interview them, let them pick up the tab.

Secret Stars • *Secret Stars* cassette (Shrimper)

Pretentiously homespun, the nine songs on this cassette have an abundance of rich moments. Like many of the bands on this label's roster, it's a home recording, which is a grand format for such stark arrangements. Don't infer that these are the usual three twee chord bedroom singalongs, though — Secret Stars have a marvelous faculty for duets. Whether it's a voice and guitar, guitar and bass, or some other permutation, their songs embody a tender counterpoint, with the settling effect of rereading an old letter from a friend. (\$3/FLP/if you're not ordering from Shrimper already I seriously doubt if reading this can help you)

Shatterproof • *Slip It Under the Door* (Fort Apache/MCA)

Bright, clean guy-rock, boldly going where Matthew Sweet has gone before. Pleasant with excellent

STRYCHNINE OR MTV? (turn the page)



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CD/ALBUM REVIEWS (cont.)

guitar sounds but an impersonal vocal performance sinks many of the songs. (\$6.99)

Sheer Terror *V Love Songs for the Unloved* (MCA)

Ho ho ho and a bottle of scum it's new speedmetal/punk act Sheer Terror, sounding like a bunch of bike messengers all wound up after a session on the Soloflex. Manufactured aggression is always good for a cheap laugh and bad for music. Perfunctory, pedestrian guitar and "me so angry" vocals—no thanks. (avoid).

Six Finger Satellite *V Severe Exposure* (Sub Pop)

LSD-party swing with a strong undercurrent of unsolved homicide: ruthless, active, predatory and composed. Sharp p-funk that could be Devo after being force-fed socialist propaganda and humiliated in a concentration camp. There's something extremely martial about Six Finger Satellite that extends beyond the cheerless, precise rhythms. Vocalist J. Ryan spits the words out with the same controlled fury one senses in films of fascist speech-makers; everything is orchestrated violence, impulse shifted to ritual, the potency increased by the premeditation. And there's your ultimate truth about Six Finger Satellite: they're brutal, precise and completely absorbing, a window on a world of perpetual nihilistic activity. Oh, and it's got a good beat you can dance to. (\$10.88)

Smog *V Wild Love* (Drag City)

I read recently that Bill Callahan resents Smog being described as depressive; how can he be so unaware of how people will perceive his songs? Slow tempos and descending melodies sung in a whisper with an affect of "barely there at all," he's lucky no one puts the Cobain kibosh on him — Bill, these are sad songs, buddy, even if you don't mean 'em that way.

They're also very, very good sad songs, all Elton John implications removed and pave(mente)d over. Callahan's no tiresome mope artist; instead, the songs teem with dark, wild drama (see album title), the sort of vein which Baudelaire enjoyed tapping. No Sunday school ebullience, but not sinking in misery either. And that's what makes Smog records so charming: just when he puts his characters in situations about which they could bitch at length, they decide that they were dumb to expect anything less than disaster. Pessimism can be liberating, yes sir.

Good old-fashioned bad relationships are offered up for a nice, close look in "Be Hit:" "Every woman I've ever loved has wanted me to hit her/And every woman I've ever loved has left me/Because I wouldn't

hit her." A little therapy (okay, maybe a lot) might help with those issues, but hell, if twisted looks this sharp in a velvet jacket, who on earth wants to be healthy? Unwell and romantic, *Wild Love* plays like the noir sex diaries of bitter grad-school dropouts.

The sound is much more clean than past efforts, owing to a studio recording this time around. It's a good move, as Callahan's vocals and guitar are scratchy but true vehicles for his mellifluous songs. The best part of this record is the contributions of Jim O'Rourke and others with string arrangements. The contrapuntal arrangements of "Bathroom Floor" are sophisticated and beautiful. (\$13.99/FLP)

SNFU *V The One Voted Most Likely to Succeed* (Eptaph)

I thought Green Day was the one voted... well, whatever, nevermind. With a vocal technique pointing directly at old hardcore and the new SoCal guitar-soaked-in-flange, SNFU makes uncompromising and loud music. Really there's not much to this, it just kicks ass. (\$8.99)

Sparklehorse *V Advance Cassette* (Capitol)

If I paid more attention to the executive hopscotch at labels I'm sure I'd be able to trace Capitol's recent signings' massive shift to the left to key personnel decisions in the A&R dept., but I'm much more inclined to tell you

how Mark Linkous' previous connections (Cracker and Gutterball, to name two underwhelming bands) didn't prepare me for his utterly enjoyable and listenable home recording project. Sparklehorse are indeed the sound of the majors invading indie rock: these are the same rough-hewn tunes that spindly geeks gush over when they're released in batches of 1,000, only with more top to bottom consistency and some outright radio wooing: "Heart of Darkness" ought to get decent amounts of airplay, and I'll welcome it's disjointed, pretty sounds no matter how many times I hear it piped through Urban Outfitters when I'm buying drinking glasses and underwear. This is plain old cool. Or, cool, old and plain. (\$10.88)

spdfgh *V Grassroots* (Dirt/Half a Cow)

The angular blurts of guitar tip you off to their modern aspirations, and spdfgh have a lovely and vigorous sense of finishing violence on throwaway moments. Toss a very good singer on top of it all and you have something beautifully ugly, and profoundly listenable. They're very rock and roll.

NOT EXACTLY DREW BARRYMORE'S
DIARY, IS IT? (cont. on page 31)



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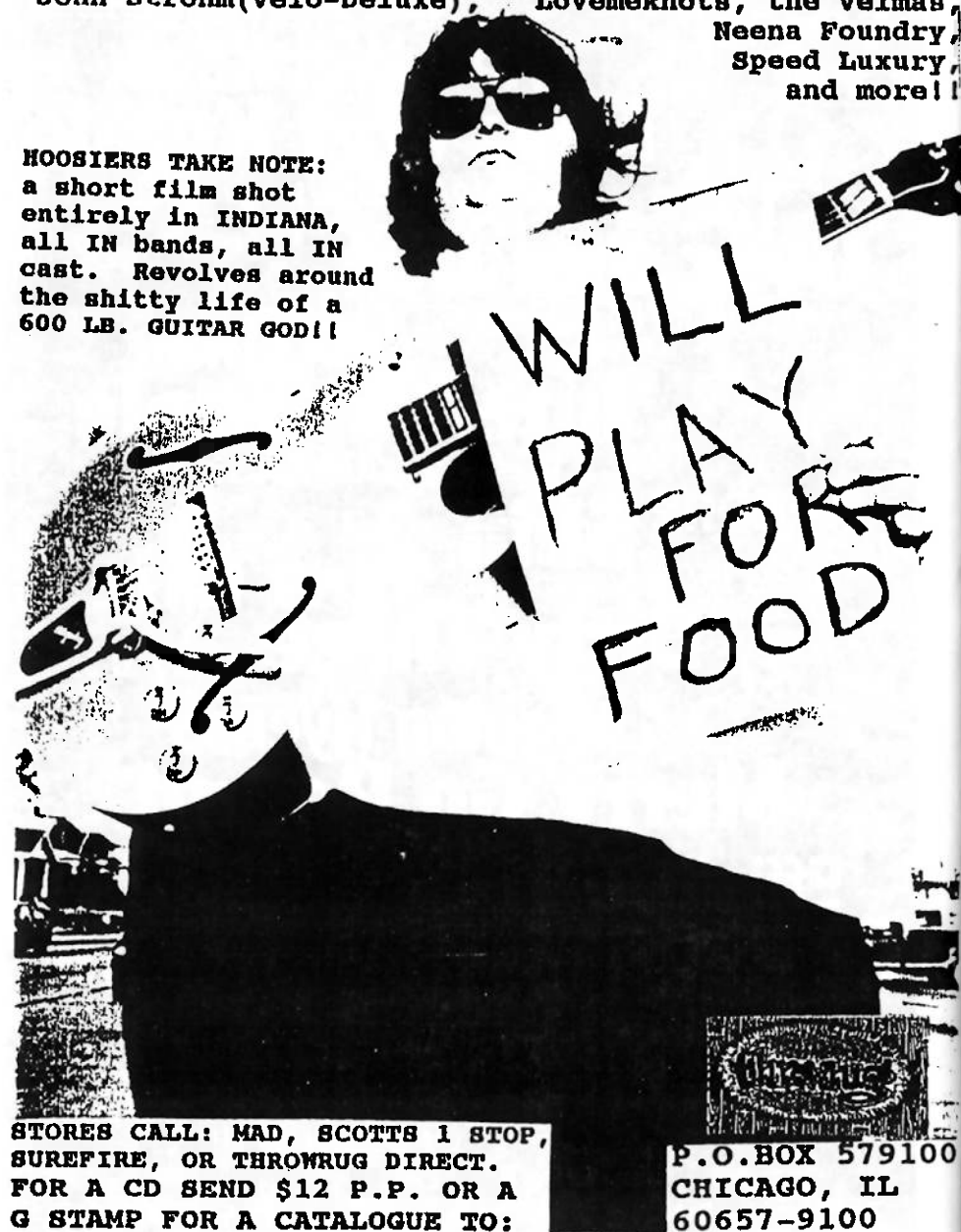


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CD/ALBUM REVIEWS (cont. from page 28)

Snippets of feedback lace through "Picture Me," cresting with a cross-eyed little guitar hook. "Nowhere to Hide" goes the emo route, conjuring a gray day where only sunshine existed before; the antithesis to Mary Tyler Moore. spdfgh avoid the pitfall of attempting to sound angrier than they are, concentrating on pop songs. Instead the edge is formed organically, and augments the music, rather than weighing it down. (\$6.99/FLP/6 songs)

Spiritualized • *Pure Energy* (Arista)

Cinematic; idyllic threads of transgressive simplicity and backhanded weirdness. High-minded gestures of deified grace and elbow grease. This cycle of 14 songs returns listeners to the ultimate truth of great pop music: psychic liberation through instant gratification and sensual indulgence. Spiritualized are able to wring every nuance from a song, rising from a gentle lull to a roaring crescendo, and back down the other side. Irony-free, too, which I hope to see develop as a trend. Maybe its because their ideas are strong enough to stand up all by themselves. (\$14.98/FLP)

Starhustler • *Mendicant* (Dirt)

New band, good songs, old blood line. Jason Hatfield, Juliana's younger brother, is the frontman. With the fabled rhythm section of Brian Dunton and Sean Devlin, Mary Lou Lord, former Blake Baby/Antennae John Strohm and several others appearing, it's apparent that this had a good head start. Unfortunately, the poor mix and busy arrangements obscure Jason's writing finesse rather than showing it off. On the few instances when his voice is moved to the front, like in the album closer "the blinds," he shines. Hatfield did an acoustic set at local radio station WMBR that was incredibly impressive. This just doesn't do him justice. (\$5.99)

State of Grace • *Hello* EP (Third Stone)

Touchy-feely, muzak-ish synthy poop. This would be a great backdrop to a night of drunken party-hopping on the Upper East with the debauched daughters of Arabian oil barons, but that's soooo 1985 in an ugly way, and so's this. (\$1.99/5 songs)

Stiffs, Inc. • *Nix, Naught, Nothing* (Onion/American)

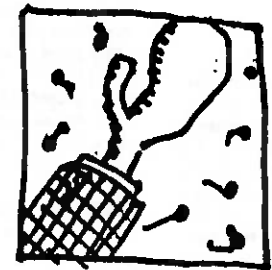
Appalling appropriation of Buzzcocks, Adverts & Damned — but a terrific quality copy, all shadings captured. If '95 is going to look like '78, it should at least have songs as catchy as this batch. The lyrics are sheer poo, but Stiffs, Inc. recreate the careful, crass insensitivity of first-wave punk perfectly when they lam-

poon sensitive artist types in "Sad Song," with it's hilarious chorus of "Another sad song, sad song, sad song... boo hoo." Nice touch. Elliott Smith fans take note.

It's odd to imagine the relationship between the crop of post-Green Day, big-sales punk bands and their forebears as product. Does one buy a Damned album or Stiffs, Inc.? Blondie or Elastica? I don't really care; most people who are protective of scene histories are just trying to look cool. Screw that. This is busy and fun. (\$7.99)

Sugarplant • *Hiding Place* (Pop Narcotic)

Fashioned completely from scrap Velvet Underground and Galaxie 500, this record is striking for the precision of its mastery of the form and for a concurrent sense of triumph of aesthetics over emotional immediacy. And while I am a fan of intense, intimate music, the emo thing can be overrated; the only thing that disqualifies a band for me is outright dishonesty (and wave hello to Jon Spencer and G. Love) or honest but reprehensible emotions. So I'll gladly accept this as an often beautiful and sometimes eerily nostalgic album. (\$7.99)



the Supersuckers • *Sacrilicious* (Sub Pop)

Now I know why the Ramones are quitting. No point in it, now that the Supersuckers have managed to take the last twenty years of every different breed of fast, "dumb" rock and birth such a snarling, rabid record of inbred sourness and awesome power. From the Dwarves to Teeny Bop to the Stooges to GHS to the Gun Club, it's all here, and so fucking pure in it's Appalachian ugliness that you got no right to even talk about it. You hear? This is the viscera. Big adrenal filibuster, 50's guitars mangled by 90's electronics, and Eddie's idiot teenager, developmentally retarded vocal charms. Completely juvenile, occasionally banal, and overdriven, this is the record that half of California's been trying to make for two years. Go buy it. (\$14.98)

Sweet Diesel • *The Kids Are Dead* (Engine)

Forget the kids, is grunge dead? That question's a lot more germane to Sweet Diesel's lightning speed metallic bullshit. Isn't it funny how easy it is to be 'hard' these days? Sweet Diesel are at the head of the class thanks to dirty guitars and clever riffs, but unless you shop @ Goodwill and consider yourself "down-town" it's a turgid trip at best. (\$2.99)

Swirl • *The Last Unicorn* (Dirt)

Polite dream-pop with looming clouds of naive psychedelia. The band are on the right drugs/wave-length, but need to ease up on the faerie imagery and

**ISN'T MASADA AROUND HERE
SOMEWHERE? (turn the page)**

CD/ALBUM REVIEWS (cont.)

the effects pedal. As it is, though, they ought to get plenty of college airplay. (\$7.99)

Thee Speaking Canaries • *Songs For The Terrestrially Challenged* (Scat/Matador)

Scalding, oily cock-rock redux, spun into filaments of caked, dried sleaze . . . I'm talkin' about stretching a glassine fiber here and that's no easy task — hey, are you paying attention? This is hard rock with nerd-smart chords, grown into a slightly artsy, poetic mood. They'll beat me up for saying so, but a few stoic moments remind me of Smashing Pumpkins or Kiss (makeup era). More chops, though, and less hooks. Guarantees a cleaner, fresher skull, every time. (\$8.99)

These Animal Men • *(Come & Join) the High Society* (Vernon Yard)

Good a place as any to tip my cap to my friend Joe, who does a brilliant piss-take on naff Everett-True wannabes, crowing about the "New Wave of the New Wave," in a hideous Cockney accent, concluding with an hilarious enunciation of this band's name. The music's better than labelmate S*M*A*S*H by a good stretch and has the occasional biting hook. Blaring guitars and anxious, spazzy drums make this an unexpected thumbs up. Not bad at all. (\$6.99)

Thomas Jefferson Slave Apartments • *Bait & Switch* (American)

A world of sleazy parking-lot romances and bargain-brand cigarettes pulled into sharp relief through ugly-beautiful garage full-bore chug. Tapers off at the end; ah, don't we all? (\$6.99)

Total Chaos • *Patriotic Shock* (Epitaph)

Busy, busy hardcore, trad stylings. I hope that Epitaph hasn't let a bunch of whiny Maximum Rock n' Rollers convince them that they have to keep putting out the same old, same old. I thought the successes of Green Day and the Offspring were pretty subversive in their lack of allegiance to any particular dogma.

Total Chaos maintain a decent breakneck pace and at no point do they seem to be forcing themselves. But they have none of the hooks that made their heroes like the Dead Kennedys and Circle Jerks so good. No matter how ugly or incendiary someone's expression may be, it should have some memorable feature. Some melodic inventiveness would help here, or interesting arrangements. As it is, this is little more than loud. (\$1.99)

the Trick Babys • *Player* (Go Kart)

Strong, attitudinally-challenged batch of simple three- and four-chord songs. Simple, yes, but well-written. The Trick Babys swagger like blue-collar bohemians through songs that touch on equal parts blues, punkabilly and late-60's Memphis soul. While the band

haven't opted for the red-line production values that make Crypt bands so fucking exciting (and yeah, that is a suggestion), they make the cut for mid-90's hot-rod trash punk. Enjoyable. (\$8.99)

Various Artists • *Soundtrack to "Love Handles"* (Throwrug)

Before I'd been there, I used to mock America's heartland. I still have my beefs (and you could start with homophobia), but my east-coast sensibilities (cultural snobbery and reflexive cynicism) took a beating the first time I visited Illinois with my then-girlfriend. "Love Handles" is ostensibly about a 500+ pound rockabilly artist. Beside the terrible and terribly confusing track listing (song titles but no band names 'til you open the booklet), much of this is plain but not bland rock. Especially winning are the various rumbling blues tunes penned by Danny Thompson and performed by several different bands. The Lovemeknots check in with 80's jangle that's good enough to survive it's datedness. John Strohm of Polara does "Love Theme," which is consistent with the album's pulse of decent rock. (\$7.99)

Vegetarian Meat • *Let's Pet* (No. 6)

Loud, chugging rock, heavy on the downbeats and guitar buzz. Pop vocals and an inventive mix (faint bits of pedal steel in the background of "Trip") bolster enough of these songs to make the album a pleasant listen. Low point include stabs at angst-rock ("Ipecac Ho") that simply underscore how tired that trend is. With a few more dynamic shifts and more consistent songcraft, Vegetarian Meat could put out an excellent power-pop CD. (\$3.99)

the Verve • *A Northern Soul* (Vernon Yard)

In the beginning, Verve were precious pretenders, straddling sentimentality and vacuous, good-looking cheap thrills. Success hasn't been kind to their sound, though. *A Northern Soul* is full of digitally-delayed guitar, stylish percussion add-ons and a sickeningly kittenish performance by lead singer Richard Ashcroft. If a guitar could pout, Verve's would. Really, there's nothing wrong with pop stars revelling in bullshit posing, it just makes it that much easier to slag them when the music is as rote and sluggish as this. (\$2.99)

Wax • *13 Unlucky Numbers* (Interscope)

Big Dumb Guitars, courtesy the production team of Slade & Kolderie; the problem is that Wax guitarist "Soda" shows the same degree of creativity with his instrument as he did in choosing a stage name: mundane and a little dumb. Wax churn out the usual uptempo alternative rock, some good moments and a lot of mediocre ones. The performance is right on with the high energy level, but that nutty guy Soda keeps turnin' it up, shining a spotlight on what it's supposed to hide: no ideas. The charm wears off quickly. They are not Green Day. (\$1.99)

PELL MELL (cont. from page 9)

units, then it goes into their pockets?

Bob: Well, we're talking about very little money to begin with . . . we gave all the money to Greg Freeman, and he bought an old sixteen track, so we were able to make that money go way further because he didn't even charge for studio time.

Dave: At one point we were signed to Sixth International, a division of Rough Trade US, and that never happened . . . we had all this really bad luck . . . we were signed to Steve Wynn's Down There label, and that never happened, Enigma, DB . . . it was sort of fledgling early 80's indie labels that were flirting with Pell Mell, and that added to my frustration.

Bob: And when we had the gall to ask for a little more money to record a follow-up to *Flow*, (which came out in 1989) suddenly we were 'uncool' with Greg Ginn, so that's why they were no longer interested in working with us, and that was the end.

Dave: So we took the money and went to San Francisco and recorded at Greg's studio and played a show at Bottom of the Hill. This was last August [1993].

anhedonia: What was it like recording at Fort Apache?

Bob: It was absolutely great. We'd never been in a situation where we could take as

long as we wanted, with twenty-four tracks. We were there for two weeks. We didn't record the whole thing, only five or six songs, and then mixed some songs that we had recorded at Greg's.

anhedonia: So I'm assuming DGC paid the bill [meaning they were already signed]? [Bob nods; yes, they were already signed]. How did you get signed to them?

Bob: Well, Ray kind of passed *Flow* around and there was this other A & R guy who liked it.

Dave: Ray was our manager and friend, and I think that he took it on as one of his first missions when he progressed up the food chain at Geffen to A & R that he was going to sign Pell Mell, because he loved *Flow* and thought that if it got more exposure and was marketed in the right way that it could really be successful.

Bob: So we kind of have two A & R guys there. The other one is Tony Berg.

anhedonia: So I have to backtrack here for a second. So when you went to Fort Apache, I assumed you produced and engineered yourselves.

Bob: No, we had an engineer, Tim O'Heir.

Dave: Before, Greg had to be bass player and engineer, and Greg's a great engineer,

(turn the page)

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but this time we could have a separate engineer and it kind of took some of the pressure off Greg.

anhedonia: Have you discussed any expectations with DGC for your band's sales performance, for what it will mean to market and promote the album?

Bob: I think all of our expectations is that the record will be available. We've never had a record come out that all over the country, maybe even all over the world, our record will be available. We're not gonna embark on any big tours or I don't know if we're going to do videos, so it's gonna be marketed in a lot more low key way than Hole or Beck or Weezer. We're not really trying to be anything, or looking for anyone to help us with our vision. We know what our vision is. Geffen's approach is to find bands and let them continue with what they were doing that made them good in the first place, but help get their music out there.

anhedonia: Ads in Spin?

Bob: Ads in Spin? Sure! Because I want to see my records in Sam Goody.

anhedonia: Yeah. There's a kind of snobbery in independent rock, sort of like once the kids are buying your record in Sam Goody then your band isn't cool anymore. So I'm glad to hear you say that. LaBradford, Tortoise, Gastr del Sol. Do you think the world is a little bit more ready for instrumental rock?

Dave and Bob: Absolutely!

Dave: Stereolab. They're not instrumental, but they're close.

Bob: And hearing Mazzy Star on WFNX...

anhedonia: Besides yourselves, who do you think the most underrated band in the world is?

Bob: American Music Club.

anhedonia: Underrated? Pick out a band you're rooting for, a kind of Rookie of the Year type of thing, or an undercredited veteran. Who do you think the world passed by?

Dave: Vinny Rellly. Durutti Column. The Go Betweens.

Bob: The Go Betweens. Those guys are incredible. And Robert Forster as a solo artist. Any of the New Zealand bands that we love... The whole Flying Nun label, and some of the XPressway stuff. Although that's cool in an underground fanzine way, nobody knows about that stuff, you can't really find their records anywhere.

anhedonia: It seems to me there were only about fifteen people there [recording for those two labels], and on the other side of the world... and here the three of us are sitting in Cambridge Common talking about it. How does this happen?

Bob: People who really love music who are just spreading the word. And college radio.

anhedonia: Throw me out a quick soundbite on college radio.

Bob: Boston has the best college radio in the world.

anhedonia: Dave?

Dave: I'll have to agree.

anhedonia: What are some of your earliest musical memories? First records, first concerts, stuff like that.

Bob: A big one was seeing the Carpenters with my parents at the Johnstown Memorial right when the *Close To You* album came out, and getting the five volume *Chicago at the Carnegie Hall* for Christmas.

Dave: My first record was *Revolver*. My dad went to San Francisco for some big business meeting and he brought back *Revolver* for me and the second Beatles album for my sister.

Bob: My brother was really into rock music, so I had all the Beatles and Stones stuff before I went to see the Carpenters.

Dave: My first concert was the Rolling Stones' *Sticky Fingers* tour. They played in Albuquerque and it was a mind blower. Somebody rolled this huge joint that they passed around, and Stevie Wonder was the opener.

anhedonia: I hate to get competitive about this sort of thing, but mine blows both of yours out of the water. My first show was Andy Gibb on the *Shadowdancing* tour.

Dave and Bob: Ooooh!

anhedonia: The warmup band was called Alessi, which were these two twin brothers in white swingin' suits, doing the rock guitar type thing, kind of like Nelson. It was at the Opera House in Boston. What were your first instruments, and when did you start playing?

Bob: I got my first drum set in fourth grade.

Dave: I cut a guitar out of cardboard, did some air guitar for a while, and then finally talked my folks into getting a real guitar. It was some kind of weird Japanese Fender copy.

anhedonia: Did you take lessons?

Bob: I was self taught, but then took lessons in high school.

Dave: Lessons sort of ruined it for me, once I started taking lessons I started to lose interest.

Bob: I started to drum along with Bad Company and Led Zeppelin records.

anhedonia: How often do you guys play? Do you consider yourself serious musicians? *Bob and Dave scoff at this*

Bob: I play once a week, when there's a recording date imminent. My drums are in Dave's basement.

anhedonia: Do you consider yourself primarily a drummer? I mean, you play guitar, too.

Bob: Yes. I play drums on every song, and I only play guitar on a few songs.

anhedonia: Dave, you play every day?



Dave: Yeah, I have a drum machine, and I'm always down there dicking around.

Bob: I would say that out of the four of us, Dave plays his instrument way more than any of the rest of us do.

Dave: But what happens is that when you play a lot, you get these habits... Practice can be a detriment.

anhedonia: My dream is to have such a good technique that I can walk over to an instrument and play a song that I hear in my head. So I practice and practice, and it's very frustrating... Because you practice scales for a half an hour and then you're ready to call it quits.

Bob: Luckily, the four of us have some kind of extra sense intuition, so when we get together we don't have to waste a lot of time getting to know each other musically.

Dave: I come up with a lot of stuff which definitely isn't Pell Mell material, and I usually know when that is, but not always. But we all sort of think the same way.

Bob: I consider myself a member of Pell Mell, not a musician.

Dave: Yeah, same.

Bob: I'm not interested in playing with other people, I'm not interested in playing with myself.

Dave: I am more. Because I play more, I feel like I need more of an outlet.

Bob: Dave has lots of backlog of songs he writes with vocals, real songs, not Pell Mell songs. So he has this whole other thing he's working on. Everyone has some other stuff. Greg's playing with Virginia Dare. They put out a ten inch record, and Steve Fisk does everything else.

Dave: He's a really good keyboard player. And the reason he's good is because he has a

lot of restraint. This sounds kind of dumb, but I don't normally like keyboards. But Steve managed to make me like them, begrudgingly sometimes.

anhedonia: Does the fact that the band lives on opposite coasts keep you guys together?

Bob and Dave: Yeah.

Dave: But the hardest thing for us is titling our songs.

anhedonia: Why is it difficult?

Dave: Because [our songs] are more abstract; it attaches some connotation to it which might limit the experience. It's kind of like making a video, 'So that's what it's about?' That stupid plot? It kind of shrinks it down.

anhedonia: What do you think your creative process is like?

Dave: Some of the best stuff is always accidental to me. I'll hear some complete accident on tape and then go back and explore it. I still can't believe I'm playing with these guys in a way, because they're all so good, so I can listen to this stuff over and over again.

anhedonia: How well do you guys know each other?

Dave and Bob: Pretty well; very well.

anhedonia: So are you friends who became a band, or did you become friends because you are in a band? [Silence. To Dave:] If you had a shit day, would go home and call Bob?

Dave: Absolutely.

anhedonia: I think there is something wonderful about your band, that it allows you to have a sane non-rock and roll

PELL MELL (cont.)

lifestyle. I think rock and roll lifestyles are destructive, and yet I love the music.

Dave and Bob agree

anhedonia: What do you do during the day?

Dave: I have a partnership in a video production company with a guy in Braintree.

anhedonia: Bob is a graphic designer, and Dave has his video company... it gives me hope. I hope this indie rock/punk/post-Nirvana explosion will foster a kind of stay at home rock star kind of thing [one year later: God, was I dumb].

Dave and Bob: Absolutely!

Bob: I think it would be impossible to listen to our music and not think that we were music fans. That's what we're all about, loving music. It's almost as if we love music so much that we can't bear the thought of putting words on it. It's being totally in love with the sounds of instruments.

anhedonia: Are you proprietary about your music? Would you do soundtracks and stuff?

Bob: We would love to do soundtracks.

Dave: That's one of our goals with DGC, to get into soundtracks. That's been discussed. We're hoping from the DGC thing to be able to keep making records. As you get older, it's harder to fly to San Francisco and crash on Greg's floor with his girlfriend and the whole band. I mean, we'd do it, but you reach a certain point...

anhedonia: And in return, how much ethical compulsion do you feel to do what they'd want to sell your record? How many of these interviews are you willing to sit through?

Bob: I think we have an interesting story, we'd do lots of interviews. We're like OK cola, but we're a band.

anhedonia: Are you signed to [DGC] for just this album? What's the deal?

Bob: Two with options.

anhedonia: And based on the sales, they decide to drop or keep you?

Bob: You've got to realize, no one expects us to be Loverboy. We've taken an extremely modest advance. There's not a lot riding on this. Lucky for us, we have a lot of people at Geffen behind us who are not trying to force this into something it's not.

anhedonia: My curiosity is, for them, if you can do it low-budget and break into the college market, maybe a little better, for them it would be like stopping to pick up a dollar bill on the street. I don't think that they see you as being a huge thing.

Dave: But it is sort of accessible in a way. A lot of people from different camps like our records. I think our problem is that there's really been no archetype for what we're doing... People are always saying we're 'surf music' because all the instrumental bands

that people know are "novelty" acts. But now with people like Stereolab, the landscape is changing.

anhedonia and Bob agree

Dave: People seem to think that instrumental is like a little niche.

Bob: It's like the 'girl band' thing. No female wants to be told, "OK, you're in a girl band"... or "You're in an instrumental band." We would prefer to play with American Music Club or Stereolab and not be stuck in an instrumental pigeonhole.

anhedonia: Maybe the fact that I wouldn't even consider it a pigeonhole could be a sign that the landscape is changing.

Dave: Maybe [the pigeonhole thing] is just baggage we're carrying around because we're such old farts.

anhedonia: My first thought when I think of Pell Mell is "rock band."

Dave and Bob: Great, that's what we want.

anhedonia: Then I think instrumental band, then I think beautiful cover art. And I like the guitar sound because I'm a guitarist.

Dave: We're not really opposed to vocals. Steve is one of the voices... Ray's on it, too... I can see using the voice as another instrument, but to sing now...

Bob: What would we sing about? What is there to say?

anhedonia: Last question: What would people be really surprised to read about Pell Mell?

Bob: I think that we're signing to DGC. That would be the most surprising.

The months went by, and still I didn't publish — but I kept in touch with Bob and Dave. The album came out and they toured each coast for a week. But the remarkable moments were when I started to hear their single just pouring out of radios wherever I went: Urban Outfitters; cars in traffic on Newbury Street; portables on the beach at Walden Pond. I even called them a couple of times, all breathless and geeky: your song's on the radio! They took it in stride with much more levity than myself, I must say.

Dave has also been an especially welcome source for exchanging tales of music business silliness; the insane drive for more, newer, faster, bigger, better hits. Early last February I was talking to him and asked if he had heard a certain record yet. He said he had and I commented "yeah, I guess that's pretty old." We both laughed when we realized that it wasn't due for release for several weeks. "Do you ever get the sensation of something have caught its own tail?" he asked.

Do I ever.



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Letter to the French Consulate

Yeah, for real. Contributed by Per Holmberg and Ally Magrino.
Per worked at the French Consulate, where some guy sent them a lot of letters just like this one. He's since moved on the Norwegian Consulate (disappointed with low response level). Gotta love the line breaks with this guy.

February 2, 1995 th.

..... the germans had this top secret operation going called nena kerner, it must have been such a secret. I think I was lucky to find about I mean find out about it myself, I suppose you know all about that and how I was going to have a sister named lisa who thought I loved her the most, (she had blond hair) but I was going to invent some tyre of super bomb, and I was going to blow up the world with this bomb, I guess it had nothing to do with Great Britain

I must have been the man who wrote letters to rock groups in new york city and wrote "just give me a checking account and a credit card and I'll show the people how to write things," this went on something like "money, honey," you didn't hear this every day

evidently I had expressed some disliking toward the rock group smashing pumpkins, I wrote they could find themselves a policeman, I told them all my secrets and told them all of my horror stories and this was so bad you'd wonder if I was writing this is how much I hate you, there might be some confusion about that, but I'd doubt that they read what I wrote, as the story would go, they wouldn't be interested in edgar allan poe, the dead man they buried under the street in Baltimore

there was some confusion about a lot of things, I sort of wondered what it took for these people to go away, like I wrote, I was interested in some of these bands from Germany and I had been writing to them constantly

I was still wondering what it meant when you ruined your life, I didn't have the time for it myself, I knew that much, but George Orwell made the people paranoid, they were going to betray people and so on, it sounded alright to me, I wondered what the people expected from their lives, I knew that I had had my fun in the sun, and I thought ruining your life seemed like it would work out

things were a disaster though, I wrote about it and added method to the "madness," no one knew what a disaster things were, I wanted to be a nurse aid in the mental health department at the hospital where I did volunteer work, I wanted to have a seminar, "lets make the paper turn black," that had something to do with it, I thought I'd let you know though, I guess I had lost interest in Jawbox and Eve's Plum, I needed to dump all of my problems on someone, and I didn't have what it took to measure up to these people there

February 5, 1995 sund.

..... they were going to find me a person to be in Belgium, and everyone was hoping for some great things to happen, but I think I turned into Frankenstein's monster, ("it's alive!") that's too bad, I'm not sure how much success I was having being the one or two person or persons that I was or "were," I resignex I mean resigned myself to wanting a ll been tan trenchcoat with a small collar, (there was a problem with lapels and going to Las Vegas, my head looked like a triangle from the side) I'd need a fish slugger (I could hit someone on the head with it, never give batons a flashlight, they could hurt someone with something like that) and a boxer head mask, 'd I mean I'd pop up in photographs in the second world war often, it had something to do with walk me-talk me and having sex with short hair, with your head chopped off, on every drug imaginable, you should know all about that, that was the best part and I found another th-

ing that I liked, I don't know, a couple of weeks ago I thought about toys that I could play with, I guess it all started with yellow condoms and natural lovers whatever they were, this led to being a urologist and using a contour pen by Papermate, blue ink that no one uses, I'd specialize in penis fractures if there are such a thing and my guess is that they do exist

so I had to write about the dreaded enemy, leading a wasted existence, the quality of their lives and my own predicament, the fires of hell were leaping higher and I wondered if I should jump into the burning pit, I think that anyone could figure out the "rest"

I could imagine a world where Mao Tse Tung had a problem a bit like mine, with no one to be but himself but no one wanted to hear about it and I didn't blame them

what I wanted to write about was the German tourist office in New York, I wrote that I really need to write to the tourist for the former USSR, but I don't know what to write, I know you have to work at things and make them happen with your karma but everyone is the same person or a different person in some way, that isn't worded right, (my specialty was just being alone) but if the German tourist office is like Amos Duul, the band from Germany there's a problem, I might not know what girl I like and one team might be scoring a lot of points, then there's your president Mitterand, I don't know, this must have ended a bit anti-climactically here

letter referred to the bands
Eve's Plum and Jawbox, and
some girl who's kind of tall
who is a nurse aid at Manchester Memorial Hospital

I might as well mention something about Feb. 1995 issue of ALLURE Magazine

I might have wanted to write "your president Mitterand knows all about these people, doesn't he?"

side of the head was a mistake
playing pool was a mistake

Nonny's Corner

My Mom decided that, hey, if everyone's a critic, where's her column? As her child, grateful for having been brought up on the Beatles and taken to Stop the War rallies, I said, "Um, okay." Plus, she likes Slant 6, so she's qualified. We did these in one afternoon, mostly in the car. I just wrote what she said, with my comments in brackets.

the Geraldine Fibbers • *Lost Somewhere Between The Earth and My Home* (Virgin)

I love it. This feels like sitting in a tram in a foreign country, watching the land go by. I really like it. You know what this reminds me of? Jacques Brel. I really love it, all of it, the loudness ... then back to one voice. It's passionate.

Seymores • *Piedmont* (Vernon Yard)

So far I'm finding this very mellow. It's the kind of song that lets you talk in a supper club. I'm torn between saying I really want to like it but its not as creative as Geraldine Fibbers. It's just not as interesting. And he always keeps sounding flat to me.

Half Japanese • *Hot* (Safe House)

Whoo-hoo! This is shrill, harsh, abusive. It's interesting. [turns it way up]. Sounds like a valley girl, the way the voice goes up. Does this remind you of Kiss at all? Heavy metal ... This would be great on a sweaty night in a mosh pit. Was Kiss the guys that painted their faces? That's who this reminds me of. They're versatile. Some of the songs are painful, some are clear. You really like them, don't you? [yup, I do.]

Zumpano • *Look At What The Rookie Did* (Sub Pop)

Shades of the Beach Boys. [suddenly executes a terrifying bypass of a dozen cars on an off-ramp]: Heh heh. I like them a lot, they're user-friendly, very cheerful. They'd get me up for school in the morning [my mother is a teacher]. They keep me smiling. I like the consistency in their sound: the Beach Boys of the 90's. They wear well.

Specula • *Erupt* (Scat)

[Bobs head to drumbeat. Turns it down when the guitars come on.] I think the bass overpowers the upper register — there's something interesting going on up there and I couldn't hear it. Which is not to say don't like the *bom-bom-bom* ... they leave me speechless.

I would like more balance. I would like the voice in ascendance, not just the *bom-bom-bom* of the bass. But I like this song ["She Walks In Sunshine"]. See, I think they're creative, I just think their technique needs improvement. This one ["Hello Pain"] reminds me of the Doors a little bit. Maybe its the register ... a little Jim Morrison ... the slowness of it.

Earth Eighteen • *Earth Eighteen* EP (Medicine)

This is like Batman coming across the Riddler. HAAAAHHHH! I like them.

WCKR SPGT • *A Tea Party of Love* (Car In Car Disco)

I hate this. I don't like when people swear like that. Are people considered hip when they're tone deaf? I hate it! Scream, scream, scream 'til you're hoarse, then you're hip! Uck! [editor attempts dissent, gives up]

Truly • *Fast Stories ... From Kid Coma* (Capitol)

I like them. It's a pretty sound and I think the beat is nice. This is a record you could dance to. Not swing, necessarily, but dance. One thing I really like is that you can hear the voice, even

though there's a really strong bass. They don't sound howly; there might even be a musician in the band. They like to start songs with church music.

the Moles • *Instinct* (Flydaddy)

This sounds like an Italian street fair, something you'd hear in the North End [Boston's Italian neighborhood - ed.]. This is right out of theater — I can see a play all around it. Right out of "Sweeney Todd." I love it! This is a guy, or girl, I don't know ... person who's been listening to Andrew Lloyd Webber. I really like it — *better* than Andrew Lloyd Webber. It's very interesting, musically. You don't like this at all, do you? [I tell her I *do* like it, and play her "Christmas Trees" from the Cardinal album]. He's phenomenal. He needs a play around his music.

DFL • *Proud To Be* (Epitaph)

I'll tell you what's wrong with this, number one, again, you can't hear what he's saying. I can't identify with the music. These could be buskers on the street. They're aggressive in getting your attention, but for what? I don't like the balance of the instruments and the guy screaming and shouting. They're all the same, same guy screaming

his brains out ... when you listen to the other bands there was something for the brain to work with. This is just bludgeoning you into oblivion. Maybe if I were 25 years old I'd want to be bludgeoned. [looks out the window]. Even the birds can't stand it. They think if they go loud enough, fast enough, hard enough, it'll be great. [So?] I'm not 25 years old, obviously. See, gentle persuasion works with someone my age.

Low • *Long Division* (Vernon Yard)

Bridges of Madison County. [I threaten violence.] Too bad — it's romantic. Oh, it's beautiful. It really creates a very beautiful mood. You're going to hate me for saying this, but I remember early folk ... [Mom starts to cry during "Below & Above"]. It reminds me of early Joan Baez, and of myself in college, raptly staring up at the ceiling and listening to the soft sounds. It's very sweet. A very vulnerable quality in that voice. It reaches right down in to your heart. Their music speaks for them, they don't have to beat you over the head with it, they're confident. All that battering music seems to me to be for people who are insecure [I laugh (she doesn't know how right she is)]. And I love their standard of excellence. I love their chords. It's very nurturing music.



Singles, and unhappy about it . . .

Little sexy black circles in virginal white sleeves . . . who are you calling a pervert, pervert? Gimme back my limited edition GBH flexi, you bastard . . .

Bardo Pond • "Dragonfly" (Compulsiv)

Simple but ominous repeating bass riff plus "emotional" female groans and heavy doses of tortured, grating guitar. Poor miking = muddy sound = reduced impact, but if they learn to write songs with key changes they'd see serious college chart action and art-student fawning. B-side "Blues Tune" has a better mix, showing off some nice crusty guitar.

Beatnik Filmstars • Pink Noize EP (Slumberland)

Another remarkable performance from the shame of Bristol. Given to scurrilous, dour pop redolent with British soul and typically oblique sonic references, the songs on this EP are surprisingly mature, catchy, and somehow so out of whack and bastardized that they sound like very little else. Fantastic EP.

Chrome Cranks/Psyclone Rangers • Split 7" (Carbon 14)

Comes with Carbon 14 magazine, which is kind of boring like this one, only I'd never publish such timid, stunted writing. Anyway, the Cranks toss off the Yardbirds' "Lost Woman" while the Rangers tackle CCR's "Effigy." Chrome Cranks' side has an excellent jam in the middle, white noisy guitar one-note hammerings like old Spacemen 3. They don't do the 'song' part as well, though. The Psyclone Rangers sound like they wish they had Mon-

ster Magnet's studio budget. Ho hum. CCR was not a metal punk band.

Difference Engine/Nonpareils • "Flex Lavender"/"Exit" (Over the Counter)

Nonpareils are good-looking bass/guitar/drums with some nice, gently kiltering boy/girl harmonies. Difference Engine are more involving, with a pulsing bassline, strong female vocal, and guitar parts suggesting but never falling into an anthemic chorus. Both bands have the sleepy, oblique songwriting sense of Small Factory and other Providence indie-poppers.

E.A.R. • "Pocket Symphony" (Sympathy For The Record Industry)

A new-fangled 5." Wonder what the size/packaging revolution really indicates. A-side "Mesmerize (Reprise)" is basically twenty-four notes stretched over three minutes of drone and hiss that circle in a lazy ellipse. Both beautiful and dull. B-side "D.M.T. Symphony (Flashback)" is a bit more uptempo, which is to say that its only extremely slow, as opposed to glacial. Same dull prettiness, but the weird electronic sizzling sounds are more interesting. Slick and soaked in a lysergic glaze.

Fig Dish/Everready • "Eyesore"/"Weezer" (Liquid Meat)

Dumb, dumber, dumbest: Fig Dish, a Chicago band playing Cali bubblepunk . . . it's that bad. Remind me of nothing so much as the sup-

porting cast in "The Wizard of Oz" 'cuz they desperately need a heart and a brain. Everready is better, nifty half-step guitar hook and an adenoidal, horny vocal performance. I got this from A&M's publicist as that's Fig Dish's new home, but it sounds to me like they signed the wrong band. Hard to believe, an A&R person being clueless, I know . . . go figure.

Fledgling • "Red Messiah" (TVT)

Bombastic, over-produced post-punk with melodramatic female vocalist wailing over loud, insipid wah-wah guitars. B-side is a softer variation on the single, with an embarrassingly dumb rush of power chords on the chorus. Anything this self-consciously overwrought makes me cringe . . .

Garbage • "Vow" ("Discordant"/DGC)

Butch Vig's band (he produced Nirvana, Smashing Pumpkins, and a bunch of other bands who felt a compelling need to either follow the herd or serve themselves up on a bed of loud, warm guitars). A pop melody surrounded with anal-retentive alternative-rock sounds, it basically works as a commercial single, but a throw-away. Pathetic, too, as this guy has enough career stability and experience that he could have really stretched out and come up with something interesting. This is not going places, Butch. Back to the mixing board.

the Goops • "On The Road With . . ." (Blackout)

Loud, plain rock music. Tries to cop an attitude, and does: of a Nebraskan teen rebel, bent out of shape 'cuz his parents locked up the Playboy Channel. Yawn.

Grimming Bitches • "Rubberbullet" (Last Beat)

Oddly affecting A-side "Entangled" documents one more semi-thoughtful guitar battering and an apopleptic young lady leaning into the microphone. It'd all be balderdash were it not for the ugly guitar in the second verse and the vigorous execution. B-side is more dissonance divided by soft repeats of a standard melody. Too many borrowed ideas.

Heartworms • "Thanks for the Headache" (Darla)

Guitarist Archie Moore of Velocity Girl appears, but without the pile of equipment that drowned the songs on *Simpatico*. Pulsing, melodic indie-pop leaning to the sensitive but on-key side. Hesitates and then darts around a frail little hook that appeals with its understated elegance. Packaging is pretty.

Hovercraft • "Zero Zero Zero One" (Repellent)

Mr. and Mrs. Eddie Vedder making hollow, dissonant, unfriendly overgrown insect sci-fi noises. With a different family tree this would be a big hit with the Forced Exposure crowd: no melodic structure, "challenging" rhythm shifts, and an undeniable ability to threaten.

Inkling • "Friends Are For Loving" EP (Rubber Goldfish)

Lots of people carp about clumsy, cutesy, overly precious indie rock, but like supposed lazy welfare mothers or Bigfoot, there's a lot more dialogue than confirmed sightings. So when you have a genuine example, you look closely. It's all here: simple, childish singing and songs; careless, shoddy recording and musicianship, and a nagging, persistent sense of overconfident self-obsession. It's awful. Ugh.

Milkmoney • "I Can't Move" (Reproductive)

Loud, slow angry blues in the vein of Come and pre-rehab Royal Trux. What makes the nut here is vocalist Denise Monahan's willingness to sing as well as growl, and an absolutely fantastic recording by John Wood. B-side has a stronger melody and mood and nicely overdriven guitar.

Palace Brothers • "West Palm Beach" (Palace/Drag City)

Leave the golf clubs in the attic and just drive down to the shore and wade into the surf . . . I'm never coming back. For a few years now Will Oldham has been purifying pain in

MORE LITERARY IPECAC (turn the page)

7" REVIEWS (cont.)

his backwoods still, wringing blues from country licks and daring to sing poetry about and for truck stop losers and trashy white boys. I sincerely don't know if music gets better than this: sad, epochal and unflinchingly precise in its lyrical focus. Indelibly stunning. Not since Leonard Cohen has an artist married such a desolate vision to such perfect melodies. B-side is less lyrically consistent and not as strong, though still well-performed.

Pie • "Superhorse" EP (Cream Cloud)

Hands down the best new hard-indie band on the continent. Sure, they're friends of mine, but I've got a long list of former friends who've heard my honest opinions. Trust me: this is an amazing group of four songs of crushing might and liberating beauty. Beatific choruses and nihilistic noise are one potent fucking dose. If you need to remind yourself why you bother with it all just crank the chorus of "Bag of Candy." I personally guarantee it. Pick of the issue.

Piper Cub • "Number One Sound" (Sub Pop)

Sub Pop has started to release and release side projects for its roster's members. This is another Velocity Girl spin-off (see: Heartworms on Darla), sounding a lot like... well, like early Velocity Girl with male vocals. The A-side has a good clean chorus and a "hoo-hoo" hook right of "Sympathy For The Devil" and really rocks. B-side is a B-side.

Sincola/L7 • split flexi with Pop Culture Press #34

Sincola give us one more bouncy 4/4 song with power chords and single note leads. Only distinguishing feature is an overly hyper female vocal performance. L7 cover Blondie and have never sounded more tired.

Elliott Smith • "Needle In The Hay" (Kill Rock Stars)

4/4 acoustic strumming, gloomy verse with a nagging and ultimately memorable refrain. While this post-punk songwriter thing

seems to be reaching the apex of its trend cycle, the whole minimal-arrangement/4-track revolution underscores how arbitrary mainstream music is — people like Elliott Smith keep producing good songs in basements and bedrooms, and we're all a little better off for it. These are three simple gray songs of strength. B-side track "Alphabet Town" is haunting and accomplished, but "Some Song" is bestest, a strong performance with a nifty little key change.

Spoon • "Nefarious" (loops, I screwed up!)

What an amazing EP — this band are definitely on the rise (at press time they are near to signing with a big label). There's a reason: Britt Daniel not only writes some of the best odd pop hits since the Pixies' heyday, and there's a distinct similarity, he also holds much less back than Charles Thompson ever did. His heart on his sleeve, Daniel has an absolutely James Dean-cool deadpan of lines like "This is fucking killing me" that makes me think that he just might be telling the truth. And if "Nefarious" doesn't wind up with a lot of airplay, than all you college radio music directors better go look in the mirror. One of the best debuts of the year.

Superchunk/Tsunami • "Kicked In"/"She Cracked" (Honey Bear)

Smells fishy: pro packaging, marquee names and old and/or rerecorded versions of songs, all as a first release for a new label. 'Chunk tune is an unplugged version from a while back, and terrific, billowing swells of strums, a hint of violin, and Mac's voice all over the map. Tsunami song is them at their tinny, punk genesis, and fucking good they are — sneering, simple and heartfelt. With one band already history (Tsunami) and the other near to it (come on, the last Portastatic record sounded just like Superchunk), is this a double goodbye kiss? If so, it's a shame the songs don't capture these bands' full (current) power.

Sweet Diesel • "The Kids Are Dead" (Engine)

Forget the kids, is grunge dead? Isn't it funny how easy it is to be 'hard' these days?

Swiss Bliss • "Too Much Juice" + 2 (Dirt)

Fuzzy rhythm guitar, dessert-sweet "ahs" for backing vocals, and some dude talkin' junk up in the foreground. This is a combination of Azalia Snail and the Swiss band Sportsguitar. The two A-side songs sound like awfully stoned indie rockers playing Burl Ives: a little dissonant drone, some fussy, clanking percussion, a lot of repetitive melody and bit of entertainment value. The B-side "Institution" is more complex and interesting.

Tart • "Kite" (Sweet Pea)

From last year. Country/indie hybrid with very nice female voices cooing obtuse lyrics. B-side is harder and better music, but the singing is still a little too mannered and saccharine.

Various Artists • Winter's Mist, vol. 2 (Silver Girl)

Five songs from the church of indie pop, orthodox wing. As usual, Allan Clapp is the standout, his high clear voice dashing though another one of his perfect little pop songs. Of the others, Scotland's McTells put forth a medium-decent effort, though it certainly isn't one of their best. The other three are typical to the point of ritualism, but not bad, and make you feel like this is a bargain for \$3.99.

Various Artists • Masturbating Twat (Fistful)

Actually, they misspelled their own compilation title and I corrected it. Folks, the nicest gift you can give yourself is spelled M-A-S-T-U-R-B-A-T-I-O-N. Okay?

Nice effort to provide a lot for your \$3-4: six songs and a brief but dense fanzine, all supposedly dedicated to female onanism, though most of the songs don't seem to be addressing the topic. Musically, Quivver do a rumbling guitar song with a basic pop hook, and Lint do a rumpled bit. Big score is the track by Megan McLaughlin, "Carolina Song," which combines two nervewracking guitars with an effective dramatic vocal. It's a dark and addictive song.

Vibraltex • "Hercules" (Candy Floss)

Sounds like the rhythm section and singer are on different planets. They want to slow-rock, and she wants to be the umpteenth person this year to reheat and reserve Debbie Harry. Could have some commercial potential, which in this case is a warning. B-side is similarly unpleasant West Coast-y version of feeble Stereolab.

Voodoo Queens • "Neptune" (Too Pure/Dirt)

Spacy, slow verses with a marvelous bass/drums/glockenspiel arrangement, then the guitars come down on the chorus big and wide-eyed and catchy as hell. B-side is energetic punk with standard chords and a female vocalist that sounds like she needs her inhaler, quick. A very good single.

I must add: I saw the Voodoo Queens live one time, and they were horrible, kicking up a soulless racket that was meant to be interesting aggression but was really tired posing. The next day I saw one of them in Newbury Comics, fawning all over some rock star I didn't recognize, saying "I can't believe you're in here, shopping here just like normal people." I'm not sure, but maybe he even eats, shits, and sleeps like a "normal person," too. Do you think this is the kind of thing (not to mention the crushing realization that he married Courtney Love) that drove Kurt to suicide?

Steve Westfield/Scud Mountain Boys • Split 7" (Chunk)

Westfield's "Sittin' on the Bottom of the World" is a potent explication of misery channeled through hardline slow country; gorgeous. Scud Mountain Boys are similar new-country stylish, but with strains of feeling Garth Brooks couldn't gain after five years of therapy. Great single.

Quick Hits

Boring, boring, boring Sidney, too fucking boring . . .

Vic Chestnut • *Is The Actor Happy?* (Capitol)

No, and neither is the A & R rep, the product manager, nor, apparently, the lead singer. Grim.

Gene • *Olympian* (A&M)

See what commerce does to art? Not to mention the IQ of "rock writers," who heard another midlands baritone and decided that the Smiths must have been Bolan-esque glam-rock, at least to justify their lazy comparisons with Gene. Olympian amount of hype. Decent album.

Ben Lee • *Grandpaw Would* (Grand Royal)

A fourteen-year-old in a bidding war between Thurston Moore and the Beastie Boys? Forget the ipecac, I'm ready to throw up right now . . . did I mention that the kid has a great facility for catchy songs? Says here he makes it, if he isn't turned into an hideous little ogre by the biz . . .

Superchunk • *Incidental Music* (Merge)

Most interesting liner notes: lotsa implied bitterness towards their own "indie" creation. This is a compilation of B-sides and various assorted tracks from comps and etc. Like everything else the 'chunk do, it sounds like they didn't try that hard and it's still miles better than the competition. Scary.

Elliott Smith • *Elliott Smith* (Kill Rock Stars)

Boo hoo and an acoustic guitar, nowhere near as good as his fans think, but nowhere near as mediocre as, say, Mary Lou Lord. For the weepy whinies; if you got the balls/liberation, go ahead & indulge . . . I do, and I'm still okay.

Nectarine No. 9 • *Niagara Falls* (Shake/Postcard)

So much good news in one CD. Postcard is coming back? Two Scottish indie rock is coming back? Get the attendants, I'm going to swoon. Kiss me, you fool.

the Monochrome Set • *The Best of the Monochrome Set* (Caroline Blue Plate)

This is a vital reissue of some of the best of the mid-80's British indie sound. It pains me to think that Sleeper has a much wider audience than these cheeky little geniuses. Taut and virile guitars and a voice for pop purists.

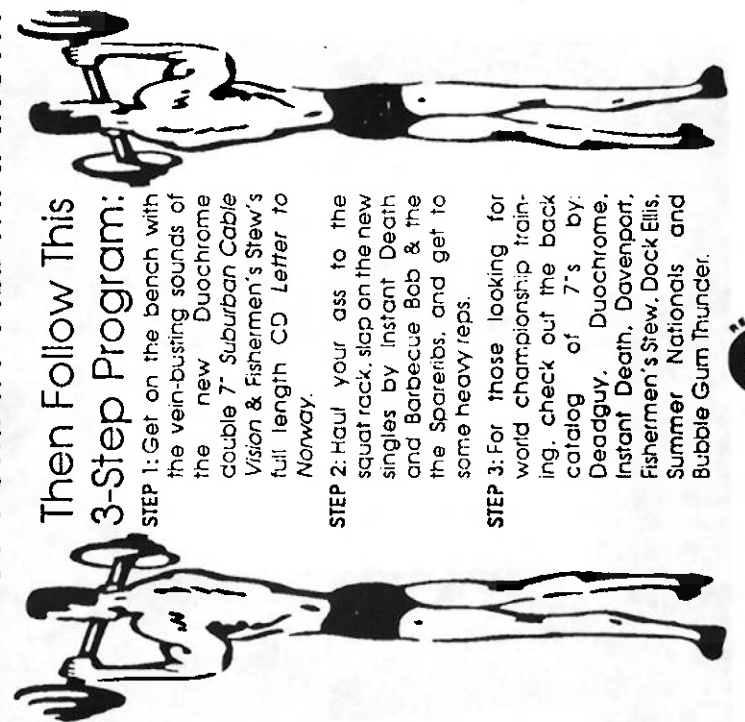
Supergrass • *Maybe I Should Coco* (Capitol)

Dunno 'bout the "Cocoing," but you might try writing your own material. I smell rampant pretension and rehashed new wave. No thanks.

Papas Fritas • *Passion Play* (Minty Fresh)

New perfect power pop, mostly nods to Kinks, Cheap Trick, and the warm, worn patina of the Modern Lovers. String arrangements, permanent songs, and an outstanding performance equal new big deal. They are a big deal; wait until their album comes out (most consistent debut in a while, top to bottom). Exceptional.

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STEP 2: Haul your ass to the squat rack, slap on the new singles by Instant Death and Barbecue Bob & the Sparebits, and get to some heavy reps.

STEP 3: For those looking for world championship training, check out the back catalog of 7"s by: Deadguy, Duochrome, Instant Death, Davenport, Fishermen's Stew, Dock Ellis, Summer Nationals and Bubble Gum Thunder.



Youth sentenced in carnival killing

TAMPA, Fla. — A teen-ager has been sentenced to 27 years in prison for the contract slaying of a retired carnival sideshow performer known as the "Lobster Boy" for his claw-like hands.

Christopher Wyant, 18, was convicted Jan. 19 in the slaying of Grady Stiles Jr. Prosecutors said Wyant was paid \$1,500 by Stiles' wife and stepson to do the job.

Wyant was charged with first-degree murder but a jury convicted him of a lesser count of second-degree murder. He also was convicted of conspiracy to commit murder.

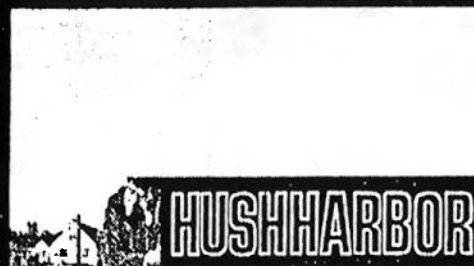
Hillsborough Circuit Judge Barbara Flescher sentenced Wyant Tuesday to 27 years on each count to run at the same time.

Mary Teresa Stiles and her son, Harry Glenn Newman, face trial on the same charges.

Stiles, 55, was shot in the back of the head at his home in Gibbstown on Nov. 29, 1992. Because of a genetic birth defect known as lobster-claw syndrome, Stiles had claw-like hands and stumpy legs. (AP)

Frozen senior, 83, leaves hospital

CHICAGO — An 83-year-old woman, who had been in a hospital for a month as an invalid, left the hospital today after a long recovery from a heart attack and major surgery. Victoria was released from the hospital after a long stay in the intensive care unit. Victoria was in fair condition after her heart surgery, but she had a heart attack last week while in the hospital. She was able to walk and eat without difficulty. Victoria was released from the hospital after a long stay in the intensive care unit. Victoria was in fair condition after her heart surgery, but she had a heart attack last week while in the hospital. She was able to walk and eat without difficulty.



Hush Harbor UP012 (10"EP/CD5)
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anhedonia

Brother, can you spare a paradigm?

So much is being made these days of the coopting of culture — I picked up issue #5 of the aspirant high-brow journal the Baffler, struck as much by its cover proclamation of a New Dark Age as by its reputation as a forum for airing serious and intelligent opinion.

Oh well. I began with an article by a guy named Tom Frank, who's long and circuitous argument seems to be that there is no such thing as dissenting culture these days, unless it is the output of a friend of Steve Albini or distributed by Touch and Go. While some of Frank's observations are astute, they're hardly new, and listening to him ramble on about how awful everything is got terribly boring.

The thrust of the piece was that the dominant paradigm no longer exists in its traditional form — that the supposed evil ogre of The Man has been replaced by an insidious cadre of fake countercultural demagogue entrepreneurs, who perpetuate the myth of The Man in order to market themselves as liberating forces. Which lets me know that he's never spent serious time in real cow towns, but that's besides the point. While much of that is true, it is too specific to be really earth-shaking. It ignores both the cyclical nature of paradigm shifts over large periods of time, as well as dissenters' needs for something to criticize. No grotesque paradigm, Tom, baby, no dissent. There you go, a philosophical dialectic made easy as pie.

What's so funny is that Frank's frantic tribulations are written in rarefied prose in a \$5 magazine that, in its own disingenuously "earthy" way, aims for an audience of graduate students at well-heeled research universities. Who's really The Man, Tom? And is the Baffler part of the problem or solution?

Frank's article is a useful example of a stock attitude among participants in the world of creativity: a belief in the evil of commerce. This is

fundamentally unsound philosophy, and stands up to neither pragmatic consideration nor any real ideals. Folks, we need big businesses. We need to have large economic organizations that allow for specialization and development. The moral problems arise when one considers the means by which wealth will be distributed. I'm not going to sink into outlining my take on that, other than to say that I'm an old-fashioned bleeding-heart liberal who believes that white men have no idea how lucky they are to be so advantaged, nor are they aware of the suffering inflicted to put them in their positions of privilege.

BUT . . . imagine a world of bartering, of an agrarian, decentralized economy. No research facilities. No recording studios, ahem. And certainly no national distribution for the Baffler. It is true that there is something repugnant about the wholesale of culture under the dishonest aegis of inspiration. That's one of the reasons that I give this rag away: people are always being milked when they go into stores; I wanted them to walk out with something for nothing. Now if I could only improve the quality, I'd feel better still, but I'm working on it. Rome wasn't built in a day.

I almost forgot the punch line. I found the Baffler at . . . Lollapalooza. So eat me.

Speaking of Lollapalooza, I thoroughly enjoyed myself at the show. I'm tired of whiny twenty-somethings mewling about it — I know, I know, it is too expensive for a lot of people, and I would agree that the best thing would be to try to reduce the horse-trading atmosphere that makes me feel as if my wallet has some hidden transmitter and is being monitored, along with everyone else's, on a Big Board beneath the stage.

Unlike the first two, though, this time you might actually make a case for the day being worth the money. An important improvement has been

**IF STILL AWAKE,
THERE'S MORE (turn the page)**

ANHEDONIA (cont.)

the added emphasis on the Second Stage. When I went, the bands playing that smaller and less formal (no seating, just wood chips) venue were the Dambuilders, Geraldine Fibbers, Laika, Moby and others I've forgotten. Moby was amazing — this guy has presence, and I immediately shucked my shirt and started jumping up and down with the (mostly teenage) kids in front of the stage. His rapport with the crowd was genuine and easy, and his forty-minute set of high-velocity disco and cheesy metal went down perfectly after a heavy rainstorm that had soaked us all. I even had one of those 'Rave Moments' where you start getting high from a combination of adrenaline, hyperventilation, and plain old joy. His set was definitely one of the two high points of the day.

The other was Pavement playing on the Main Stage. I'd seen them a couple of times before, and they were sloppy and blasé. Time, touring and record sales have changed things — Pavement, at least on the day I saw them, are a live band at the top of their form. They were impossibly bratty. Spiral Stairs spent a good portion of the set cooling off in front of a fan, minus his guitar, which he'd dropped on stage. Nastanovich clowned, a mocking wiseass. And Mark Ibold — he's the sort of guy who you know cuts people in the lift lines at ski resorts. A bunch of upper-middle-class pricks. Trust me, I am one, I should know. Unlike the past, though, Pavement were excruciatingly tight, if that's possible for their gangly pop tunes. A good mix, in-



Fee...fi...fo...fum... Heh, heh, heh...

spired playing, and they were really listening to each other and appearing to enjoy themselves as an ensemble. Steven Malkmus is a hell of a singer, and when they started with *Wowee Zowee*'s best song "Father to a Sister of a Thought," I just knew the set would be remarkable. It was. Highlight was a disco version of "Box Elder" that was somehow more honest dance than camp.

The only other musical items worth mentioning were Geraldine Fibbers' tight, gripping set of skanky country, and the absolute disgusting debacle of Hole.

The night before I went I was on the phone with a friend, who couldn't say enough bad things about Hole or Courtney Love. I rose to defend, figuring that she was just a convenient target for people who were uncomfortable with a strong woman. Well, I was dead

wrong. Courtney isn't strong, she's weak. She worked the mike just like some disgusting cock-rocker from the 70's, all idiot challenges ("I can't fuckin' hear ya!") and self-worship. And though I thought *Live Through This* was a fine album, I'm here to tell you that seeing them live made me think more highly of producers Sean Slade and Paul Kolderie, because Hole were terrible. Just awful, big, easy songs that the frat-boy types and their "alternative" multi-pierced girlfriends ate up. Thankfully I'm at a place in my life where I don't need anything from the experience, so I could just laugh. And was it ever laughable.

What was special about Lollapalooza was the general friendly vibe. Maybe it was the rain (a torrential, sheet-like outburst) or just the band line-ups, but I met a lot of really nice people just having a whole day out and seeing some music. The festival is trying harder to diversify the attractions, and the food is better. I had fun watching a couple of short films. Conversely, the security guards were way out of line, verbally and physically abusive. I was manhandled for standing in the aisle and talking to someone I know while they were in their seat. "Let's go, buddy," the neckless ape said as he started to shove me towards the lawn area. When I tried to show him my ticket stub he pointedly wouldn't look at it; the press pass worked, though. I saw this happen to A LOT of people all day long. I know that Great Woods was sacked and burned (literally, I am not exaggerating) last time Lollapalooza was there, but having overzealous goons dispensing ignorant frontier justice is not the way to improve the atmosphere, which was already a near-hippie mellow. It was pointless and shameful, another bogus outbreak of uptight testosterone power playing.

Sitting on a sidewalk in Cambridge, drunks singing behind me and the night breeze blowing in my face. Evenings in July are so vibrant, teeming with fantasy. Looking for a lover, insane infatuation, an adoring caress. I can remember the blissful exhilaration of a consummated crush, years back, and the peace I felt with her fingers entwined with mine. Now, it's work to find company, let alone love, and there's no formula or solution to the problems of solitude and its accompanying sense of constriction and suffocation.

A pair of little girls stumble out of a laundromat, awkwardly carrying a hamper full of clothes. At the crosswalk the older one stops, pulling the other back to the curb by her upper arm: "Stop and wait for the red light! ... unless you want to get run over." I smile; such massive evidence of love everywhere, it really moves me.

Night in the city — my obsession. A short, fat man with long hair and a balding crown comes out of the laundromat and sets a big, green bag of garbage on the curb, then walks into the liquor store next door. I wonder if he's the night manager, and if he drinks his way through the lonesome, tedious evenings. I can remember making that

work for me in Hartford, sitting on the couch in my apartment with the shades drawn and just killing bottles of bourbon, one after the other.

A van pulls over with a flat tire. The road is wide here, and the traffic slow, but the driver's still taken the time to plug in a flashing electric beacon and set it down beside and behind the van. Careful guy. I ask him if he wants help. He smiles and refuses, "but thank you, anyway." Thinning gray hair and a little bit too much of a tummy, he reminds me of my stepfather, with the obvious difference of the color of their skin. Night time with a flat tire is a bad time for exploring race relations; we both know this, especially in this fucked up city, and so I say nothing more. His attitude towards me reminds me of my stepfather, too: a polite but firm dismissal of my attempts at affection. I allow myself a brief fantasy of being asked to help after all, and of getting to explain to this man the resemblance and my gratitude for the opportunity. But he's changing that tire just fine on his own. In a more sober, realistic moment I wonder if I'll have the chance to show my stepfather the affection I'd like to give him. He has diabetes and isn't getting any younger. It's funny, hundreds of people will read this, but he'll never know. Better than nothing, though, by a long shot.

She used to point out the stars to me. It was as if she had the power to put them there herself, like I'd never seen them before, as if she had a magic paintbrush and was painting endless strings of tiny Christmas lights on the ceiling of the universe.

I promised to write about the Warped tour, and so here it is: What a shitty, ridiculous thing. Were any of the bands good? Yeah. Quicksand, Seaweed and Orange 9mm were all adequate hard metal punk, but the absolute jack-offs policing the place pretty much ruined it. Water was \$2, no containers were allowed in, and then THEY RAN OUT. That's right: 90 degree heat and absolutely nothing for anyone to drink for over an hour. It was at the Northampton airport, too, and the less said about the venue, the better. This "Punk Festival" was probably a better idea than execution. There was nothing to do but rot in the sun.